

(19) Europäisches Patentamt
European Patent Office
Office européen des brevets



(11) EP 0 913 236 A2

(12) EUROPEAN PATENT APPLICATION

(43) Date of publication:
06.05.1999 Bulletin 1999/18

(51) Int. Cl.⁶: B25J 9/04

(21) Application number: 98119888.0

(22) Date of filing: 21.10.1998

(84) Designated Contracting States:
AT BE CH CY DE DK ES FI FR GB GR IE IT LI LU
MC NL PT SE
Designated Extension States:
AL LT LV MK RO SI

(30) Priority: 30.10.1997 JP 299145/97
06.11.1997 JP 304720/97

(71) Applicant:
SANKYO SEIKI MFG. CO. LTD.
Suwa-gun, Nagano-ken 393 (JP)

(72) Inventors:
• Tsuneda, Haruhiro
c/o Sankyo Seiki MFG. Co., Ltd.
Ina-shi, Nagano (JP)
• Kitahara, Yasuyuki
c/o Sankyo Seiki MFG. Co., Ltd.
Ina-shi, Nagano (JP)

(74) Representative:
Eisenführ, Speiser & Partner
Martinistraße 24
28195 Bremen (DE)

(54) Articulated robot

(57) An articulated robot comprises a movable first transferring portion and a second transferring portion movably supported in relation to the movable first transferring portion by a joint portion. A workpiece is positioned at a position, where a workpiece positional deviation detecting means is located, by a hand portion formed at an end of the second transferring portion. The workpiece positional deviation detecting means detects the amount of deviation in the position of the workpiece. A positioning portion of the workpiece and a sensor portion for detecting deviations of the workpiece are formed either at the first transferring portion or the second transferring portion which form the articulated robot. A detecting operation by the sensor portion and transferring of the first and second transferring portions are enabled when the workpiece is positioned at the positioning portion of the articulated robot.

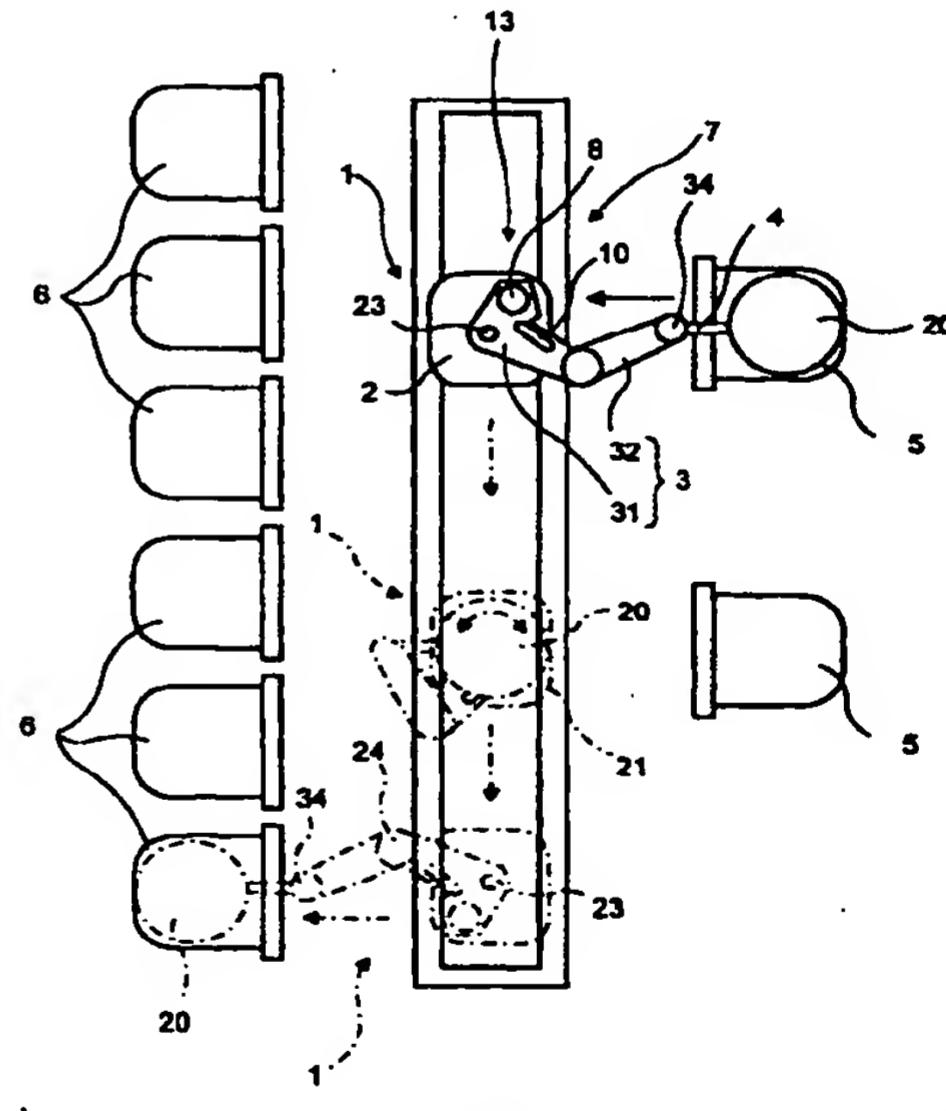


FIG. 1

Description**BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION****a) Field of the Invention**

[0001] The present invention relates to an articulated robot. Furthermore, the present invention relates to an articulated robot which transfers a workpiece, such as a semiconductor wafer.

b) Description of the Related Art

[0002] An articulated robot is used for transferring a workpiece such as a semiconductor wafer from a cassette to a processing device for photo lithography, deposition and etching. For example, as shown in Figure 16 (A), articulated robot 100 comprises base 101, first arm portion 102, which is rotatably supported by base 101, second arm 103, which is rotatably supported by first arm portion 102, and hand portion 104 which is supported by the end of second arm 103. Articulated robot 100 transfers workpiece 107 from cassette 105 to processing device 106.

[0003] In the case where a semiconductor wafer is used as workpiece 107, it is necessary to maintain the direction of workpiece 107 for a thermal processing and deposition since the crystals of each semiconductor wafer have a directional property. Therefore, it is required to keep all workpieces 107, . . . , 107 on processing device 106 in the same direction when they are transferred.

[0004] For the above reasons, a mark, such as a notch and a D flat, is formed at a given position on the edge of workpiece 107 while a workpiece rotating device, called aligner 18, having a means to detect the mark is formed, separate from cassette 105 and processing device 106 as shown in Figure 16. As shown in Figures (A) through (C), workpiece 107, which is removed from cassette 105 by hand portion 104, is first mounted on aligner 108 (Figure (D)); after the direction of the workpiece is aligned in a given direction by turning it, workpiece 107 is transferred to and mounted on processing device 106 in a given direction (Figures (E) and (F)).

[0005] However, as shown in Figure 17, if base 101 is formed such that workpiece 107 can be transferred by sliding to each of processing devices 106, . . . , 106, which are connected in parallel, the time required to transfer workpiece 107 becomes longer. In other words, it is necessary for workpieces 107, . . . , 107 to pass through aligner 108 to align the workpieces in one direction, and there is usually only one aligner 108 for two cassettes 105, 105 and a plurality of processing devices 106, . . . , 106. Therefore, if one wants to transfer workpiece 107 from lower cassette 105 to processing device 106 at the bottom in the figure, workpiece 107 must pass through aligner 108; as a result, distance of transfer by robot 100 becomes longer such that it takes a

longer time for workpiece 107 to be transferred.

[0006] Also, if one wants to transfer workpiece 107 from upper cassette 105 to processing device 106 at the top in the figure, workpiece 107 cannot be transferred until the orientation for alignment by aligner 108 is complete; therefore, robot 100 shall be idling while the orientation is carried out.

[0007] On the other hand, articulated robot 100, which transfers a workpiece such as a semiconductor wafer from a cassette to a processing device and vice versa, generally comprises two arms 102, 103 and hand portion 104, as shown in Figure 18, such that workpiece 107 can be transferred along a linear path. In the case of such an articulated robot 100, or articulated robot 100 having three arms 102, 103, 113 as shown in Figure 19, hand portion 104 holding workpiece 107 is linearly transferred in the axial direction of the hand portion such that workpiece 107 can be transferred without being rotated.

[0008] There are known transportation mechanisms such as a belt and pulley, in which two arms 102, 103 can be formed to be mechanically connected, as a means to linearly move hand portion 104. Due to these mechanisms, articulated robot 100 limits movements of arms 102, 103 (, 113). Additionally, each of workpieces 107 mounted at various positions in a connected plurality of cassettes can be transferred from each position by being held by hand portion 104.

[0009] However, when hand portion 104 is transferred while the axis of hand portion 104 passes through the vicinity of the rotational center of arm 102, that is, when the center of transferred workpiece 107 shows a path passing the vicinity of rotational center 116, a rapid rotation of arm 102 is required at rotational center 116 of arm 102, and such a position is called a singularity. As a result, an excessive load may be caused in the movement of arms 102, 103 of the above mechanism. In other words, as shown in Figures 20 (A) through (C), when support point 117 of hand portion 104 passes the vicinity of rotational center (singularity) 116 of arm 102, each of arms 102, 103 are required to move around rotational center (singularity) 116 for about 180 degree. Additionally, if workpiece 107 is transferred at a constant speed, each of arms 102, 103 must be rapidly and vigorously rotated such that unnatural movement will be caused therein. This phenomena is also observed in articulated robot 100 having three arms 102, 103, 113 and hand portion 104 as shown in Figure 21.

[0010] On the other hand, as shown in Figure 22, articulated robot 100 having direct-acting mechanism 119 capable of a horizontal transfer together with base 121 has been suggested. According to this mechanism, horizontal transfer of workpiece 107 is possible while hand portion 104 is distant from rotational center 116 of arm 102. Consequently, hand portion 104 does not have to pass the vicinity of rotational center 116 of arm 102; thus, the above problems related to the generation of a singularity can be solved. Nonetheless, to form

articulated robot 100 such that it is capable of a linear movement including base 121, a space for direct-acting mechanism 119 is needed. In addition to dust generated by direct-acting mechanism 119 during transfer, it is difficult to seal the dust inside the robot such that the robot is not able to be used in a clean room.

OBJECT AND SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0011] Therefore, a primary object of the present invention is to improve the above problems which an articulated robot to transfer a workpiece, such as a semiconductor wafer, conventionally has had. More specifically, the present invention intends to provide an articulated robot in which workpieces can be transferred while orientation of the workpieces is carried out such that efficiency of transfer of workpieces is improved. Another object is to provide an articulated robot in which transfer of workpieces can be carried out without unnatural movement in arms and generation of dust is minimized during transfer of workpieces.

[0012] In accordance with the invention, an articulated robot comprises a movable first transferring portion and a second transferring portion movably supported in relation to the movable first transferring portion by a joint portion. A workpiece is positioned at a position, where a workpiece positional deviation detecting means is located, by a hand portion formed at an end of the second transferring portion. The workpiece positional deviation detecting means detects the amount of deviation in the position of the workpiece. A positioning portion of the workpiece and a sensor portion for detecting deviations of the workpiece are formed either at the first transferring portion of the second transferring portion which form the articulated robot. A detecting operation by the sensor portion and transferring of the first and second transferring portions are enabled when the workpiece is positioned at the positioning portion of the articulated robot.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0013] In the drawings:

- Fig. 1 is a plan view showing an example of an articulated robot of the present invention;
- Fig. 2 is an oblique view of an aligner forming a workpiece positional deviation detecting means;
- Fig. 3 is a graph showing the output of an optical measurement by a line CCD;
- Fig. 4 is an enlarged view of a circled area in Fig. 3;
- Fig. 5 is a schematic drawing showing a calculation process for orientation of a workpiece;
- Fig. 6 is a drawing showing a mechanism of detecting the center of a workpiece;
- Fig. 7 is a plan view showing another example of an articulated robot of the present invention;
- Fig. 8 is a side view of the articulated robot shown

in Fig. 7;

Fig. 9 is a plan view showing yet another example of an articulated robot of the present invention; Fig. 10 is a plan view showing each arm portion and a hand portion of the articulated robot shown in Fig. 9;

Fig. 11 is a side view showing the articulated robot shown in Fig. 9;

Fig. 12 is a plan view showing a process of removing a workpiece mounted in a cassette by the articulated robot;

Figs. 13(A), 13(B) and 13(C) are plan views showing different modes to transfer a workpiece by the articulated robot with different offset lengths D in Fig. 13(A) through Fig. 13(C);

Figs. 14(A) and 14(B) are plan views showing another mode to transfer a workpiece by the articulated robot; Fig. 14 (A) is in the case of offset length D is other than zero, and Fig. 14(B) is in the case of offset length D is equal to zero;

Fig. 15 is a plan view showing another mode to remove a workpiece mounted in a cassette by the articulated robot;

Figs. 16(A), 16(B), 16(C), 16(D), 16(E) and 16(F) are plan views showing a process of removing a conventional workpiece from a cassette and transferring it via an aligner to a processing device in order of Fig. 16(A) through Fig. 16(F);

Fig. 17 is a plan view showing a process of transferring a conventional workpiece;

Fig. 18 is a plan view showing a conventional articulated robot;

Fig. 19 is a plan view showing a conventional articulated robot with three arms;

Figs. 20(A), 20(B) and 20(C) are plan views showing a process of transferring a workpiece in the vicinity of a singularity by the articulated robot shown in Fig. 18 in order of Fig. 20(A) through Fig. 20(C);

Figs. 21(A), 21(B) and 21(C) are plan views showing a process of transferring a workpiece in the vicinity of a singularity by the articulated robot shown in Fig. 19 in order of Fig. 21(A) through Fig. 21(C); and

Fig. 22 is a plan view showing a conventional articulated robot having a mechanism for linear movements.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

[0014] The following describes a structure of the present invention for detail in relation to drawings.

[0015] Figure 1 shows an embodiment of an articulated robot of the present invention, more specifically, an articulated robot which can transfer workpieces while carrying out orientation of workpieces. Articulated robot 1 comprises a SCARA (Selective Compliance Assem-

bly Robot Arm: horizontal articulated) articulated transferring portion consisting of first transferring portion 2, second transferring portion 3, which is transferred by first transferring portion 2 and which itself moves, hand portion 4, which supports workpiece 20 transferred by second transferring portion 3. First transferring portion 2 is slide transferring portion 21 which transfers in the vertical direction in Figure 1 and to which second transferring portion 3 and hand portion 4 are rotatably connected via joint portions 23, 24. Slide transferring portion 21 is linearly transferred by a known sliding mechanism (not shown in the figure) such that articulated robot 1 can be positioned in front of cassettes 5, 5 and processing devices 6, . . . , 6. Also, second transferring portion 3 comprises second arm 31 and third arm 32 which is connected to second arm 31. Then, hand portion 4, formed at the end of second transferring portion 3, that is, the end of third arm 32, places workpiece 20 at workpiece positional deviation detecting means 13 such that the positional deviation of workpiece 20 can be detected.

[0016] Positioning portion 8 for workpiece 20 and sensor portion 10 to detect positional deviation of workpiece 20 are formed on second transferring portion 3 of articulated robot 1 (they may be formed on transferring portion 2). Hence, detection by sensor portion 10 and transfer by transferring portions 2 and 3 can be simultaneously carried out while workpiece 20 is positioned at positioning portion 8 of second transferring portion 3. Sensor portion 10 is to detect notch 20a formed at a given position on the edge of workpiece 20 (see Figure 2). In articulated robot 1 of the present invention, in which second transferring portion 3 comprises second arm 31 and third arm 32, positioning portion 8 and sensor portion 10 may be formed on first transferring portion 2 or may be formed on second arm 31 as shown in Figure 1.

[0017] Positioning portion 8 is formed such that it is movable in the vertical direction as shown in Figure 8 such that workpiece 20 can be passed to hand portion 4; it is also formed such that workpiece 20 can be fixed on the upper surface. A means to fix workpiece 20 onto positioning portion 8 is not limited; a suction means is used herein. Therefore, when the center of workpiece 20 is positioned straight above positioning portion 8 by hand portion 4, which supports workpiece 20, positioning portion 8 ascends such that it can receive workpiece 20 by suction while it descends after the orientation as a given detection operation is complete; as a result, hand portion 4 supports workpiece 20 again.

[0018] Furthermore, positioning portion 8 is formed to be movable independent of movements of transferring portions 2 and 3. In other words, a rotating means is formed on second arm 31 such that the orientation can be carried out at the positioning portion independent of movements of transferring portions 2, 3. This rotating means, as shown in Figure 2, is a turn table which is driven by driving means 9 such as a motor. In addition,

analyzer 11 is formed on second arm 31 of articulated robot 1 to analyze data obtained by sensor portion 10. Aligner 7 is formed of positioning portion 8, driving means 9, sensor portion 10 and analyzer 11. Aligner 7 detects both rotational deviations and deviations of the central positions of workpiece 20; therefore, in this embodiment, it functions as workpiece positional deviation detecting means 13. Therefore, the following discusses operation of aligner 7 by using an example; first, an orientation function of aligner 7 is briefly explained.

[0019] Aligner 7 has an orientation function in which it rotates workpiece 20 and detects notch 20a (or a cut surface called orientation flat) formed on the edge of workpiece 20 to align the direction and retained angle of all workpieces 20, . . . , 20. In the case of aligner 7 shown in Figure 2, a turn table (spindle), stepping motor (including a decelerator) and a line CCD sensor are used as positioning portion 8, driving means 9 and sensor portion 10, respectively. The orientation function is structured such that optical measurement by sensor portion 10 and multiple-point analyses by analyzer 11, including a microprocessor, are carried out while rotating positioning portion 8, in turn, rotating workpiece 20. Therefore, in order to perform the orientation of workpiece 20 by using aligner 7, the positions of the outer edge surface of workpiece 20 is detected at a 1 mm pitch by sensor portion 10 while rotating workpiece 20 mounted on turn table 8. In this case, the rotation of workpiece 20 is maintained even after the detection of notch 20a on the outer edge of workpiece 20 such that at least data for one complete rotation can be obtained (Figure 3). At the same time as the above detecting operation, the obtained data are processed; for example, the point moved by 0.8 mm in relation to an average moving distance of 20 mm is determined as in the vicinity of notch 20a. Then, center 20c of workpiece 20 is calculated based on a data matrix consisting of four points (P_{n-1} , P_n , P_{n+1} , P_{n+2}) in the vicinity of notch 20a as shown in Figure 4. To calculate the above, first, a slope caused by a deviation of the axis of workpiece 20 is calculated using P_{n-1} and P_{n+2} . Then, an angle ϕ of notch 20a is calculated using P_n and P_{n+1} which are positioned on the edge of notch 20a formed as a right isosceles triangle. At the same time, positioning portion 8 is rotated such that the vicinity of notch 20a is positioned at a given position as a reference. Furthermore, a rotation of the workpiece is performed for a small amount which is calculated based on an estimated shape of notch 20a such that the retained position is finely corrected. As a result, notch 20a is shifted to a given position to be in a uniform direction such that the orientation is complete. Figure 5 shows an example of a summary of the above calculation process in which the process proceeds from the right to left.

[0020] The following explains a method to measure deviations of workpiece 20 from the center when workpiece 20 is mounted on positioning portion 8 by using the data obtained by sensor portion 10. The data

obtained from the above optical measurement by the line CCD sensor 10 is used for this detection of positional deviations; however, the data regarding notch 20a used for the orientation are supposed to be erased in advance. First, as shown in Figure 6, two points P1 and P2, which are apart from each other by about 180 degree on the circumference of workpiece 20, are arbitrarily selected. Here, it is defined that a straight line between the two points is N1 and a normal line passing through middle point M1 between P1 and P2 (that is, a bisector perpendicular to line P1P2) is N2. Furthermore, other two points P3, P4 are selected in the same manner wherein a straight line between P3 and P4 is defined as N3 and a normal line passing through middle point M2 between P3 and P4 is defined as N4. In this case, the interception point of N3 and N4 is center 20c of workpiece 20 to be calculated. Also, the center of positioning portion 8 is known in advance such that once center 20c is calculated, the deviation amount of the workpiece from the center of positioning portion 8 can be obtained. Detection of positional deviation 8 can be finished at this point; however, it is desirable to perform more accurate detection by averaging the values obtained from several times of the above analyses for the entire circumference of workpiece 20.

[0021] According to articulated robot 1 of the present invention with the above structure, it is possible to perform both detection of positional deviations of workpiece 20 while workpiece 20 is mounted at positioning portion 8 and transfer of workpiece 20 by transferring portion 3. In other words, the orientation function to rotate workpiece 20, that is, detection of positional deviations of workpiece center 20c by using the resulting data and movements of first transferring portion 2 and rotations of second arm 31 to transfer workpiece 20 can be independently performed simultaneously. Therefore, unlike a conventional robot, it is not necessary to pass through aligner 7 formed separate from the robot such that articulated robot 1 can transfer workpiece 20 from cassette 5 to processing device in the shortest distance. Additionally, a space for a separate aligner in a conventional robot is not required any more since aligner 7 is formed together with articulated robot 1; as a result, the space can be effectively used for some other purpose. Moreover, due to the fact that articulated robot 1 and aligner 7 are formed together, it is much easier to adjust the position of aligner 7 when it is replaced.

[0022] In the above embodiment, first transferring portion 2 is formed of slide transferring portion 21; however, it can be formed of turn table 22 as shown in Figures 7 and 8. As described in detail later, the robot of this embodiment is to prevent generation of singularities. Therefore, such first transferring portion 2 (that is, a turn table) moves in the same manner as the arm in terms of transferring workpiece 20 by rotation; at the same time, it functions as a base to support second transferring portion 3 and positioning portion 8. In the example shown in the figures, a transferring portion is formed

such that second arm 31, third arm 32 and hand portion 4 are rotatably connected to turn table 22 as first transferring portion 2 via joint portions 2a, 3a and 4a. In such articulated robot 1, it is also the same as the previous embodiment that the time required for transferring workpiece 20 can be shortened by performing transfer of the workpiece and the orientation simultaneously. Also, it is possible to form first transferring portion 2 which can perform both slide transfer and rotation by combining slide transferring portion 21 and turn table 22.

[0023] The following describes an embodiment of an articulated robot to transfer a workpiece in which a workpiece can be linearly transferred without unnatural movements in an arm portion. This embodiment also comprises aligner 7 to rotate workpiece 20 and detecting means 10 to detect notch 20a formed on the end of workpiece 20 as shown in Figures 10 and 11; however, they are previously described such that any discussion regarding the parts will be omitted herein.

[0024] Figures 9 through 15 show an embodiment of an articulated robot to which the present invention is applied. In this articulated robot 1, first rotational axis 2a is formed at a position eccentric in relation to rotational center 1a of turn table 22 which is a first arm portion. An arm rotatably supported by first rotational axis 2a is second arm 31. Also, third arm 32 and hand portion 4 are rotatably supported at the end of second arm 31 and at the end of third arm 32, respectively. By controlling the rotations of first arm portion 22, second arm 31, third arm 32 and hand portion 4, first rotational axis 2a is shifted to a position to keep a sufficient distance with the path of the center of workpiece 20 such that generation of singularities is prevented. The following describes a structure to prevent generation of singularities.

[0025] First arm portion 22 is formed of a turn table, which is rotatably formed on rotational center 1a. However, one is not limited to the mode of this embodiment; it is possible that it can be structured of an arm which is formed at a fixed base. Since first arm portion 22 is rotatable, it is possible to rotate first rotational axis 2a, second arm 31, third arm 32 and hand portion 4 in order toward the end of the entire arm portion and to stop at an arbitrary position.

[0026] Links among first arm portion 22, second arm 31, third arm 32 and hand portion 4 forming articulated robot 1 comprise independent drives such that a link can rotate independent of other links. Therefore, it is possible to produce a motion by one link or motions by a plurality of links combined. Drives are not limited to any specific form; they can be stepping motors or servo motors wherein rotations of each arm portions 22, 31, 32 and hand portion 4 are separately controlled by a controlling means such as a computer.

[0027] Similar to second arm 31 being rotatably supported by first rotational axis 2a via a joint portion, third arm 32 and hand portion 4 are rotatably supported by second rotational axis 3a and third rotational axis 4a, respectively. About the length of each link is, as indi-

cated in Figure 10, distance between axes of first arm portion 22 is L1, distance between axes of second arm 31 is L2, and distance between axes of third arm 32 is L3. Also, a transfer means to transfer workpiece 20 is formed at the end of hand portion 4 such that it can hold workpiece 20 from the bottom by suction. L4 is defined as a length between third rotational axis 4a and the center of the suction means.

[0028] Furthermore, in articulated robot 1 of this embodiment, as shown in Figure 11, arms 31, 32 and hand portion 4 are formed to be movable in the vertical direction all together. Therefore, the degree of freedom of this articulated robot 1 is defined as 5; the robot is formed to be capable of free motion including in the vertical direction. Instead of second arm 31, the same effects can be obtained by forming first arm portion 22 to be movable in the vertical direction.

[0029] The following describes an operation in which articulated robot 1 removes workpieces 20, . . . , 20 mounted on processing device 6 as shown in Figure 12.

[0030] It is defined that a line, which passes through rotational center 1a and which is parallel to the direction of a workpiece to be transferred, is center line C, and a distance from the center of workpiece 20c to center line C is offset length D.

[0031] In the case of removing workpiece 20, it is known in advance from which position workpiece 20 is removed. Therefore, first, rotation of first arm portion 22 is controlled such that second arm 31, third arm 32 and hand portion 4 are shifted to an appropriate position in relation to the position of workpiece 20 where singularities are not generated. The appropriate position in this case means a position where generation of singularities is prevented, more specifically, positions indicated in Figures (A) through (C). In other words, as shown in Figure 13, in each mode with different offset length D of workpiece 20, the position of workpiece 20 to be removed is known in advance such that first rotational axis 2a as a rotational axis of second arm 31 is shifted to a position to maintain a sufficient distance in relation to the path of the center of transferred workpiece 20. For example, as shown in Figure 13 (A), first rotational axis 2a is shifted towards workpiece 20 if workpiece 20 is positioned away from first arm portion 22; on the other hand, it is shifted to the lower position in the figure if workpiece 20 is closer to first arm portion 22 such that a distance with the path of the center of workpiece 20 is sufficiently maintained. Similarly, as shown in Figure 12, first rotational axis 2a is shifted to an appropriate position in relation to each workpiece 20 by rotation of first arm portion 22. When workpiece 20 is removed from lower processing device 6, it is obvious that arms 31, 32 and hand portion 4 are arranged to be symmetric in relation to center line C of Figure 12. Also, symbol 5 in the figure indicates a cassette.

[0032] After first rotational axis 2a is shifted to the appropriate position as above, first arm portion 22 is stopped therein such that workpiece 20 is removed from

processing device 6 by second arm 31, third arm 32 and hand portion 4. In this case, second arm 31, third arm 32 and hand portion 4 are linearly shifted while workpiece 20 is removed such that hand portion 4 faces in a constant direction. In other words, when workpiece 20 is transferred by using articulated robot 1, workpiece 20 is linearly transferred by combining rotational movements of each link while an angle of hand portion 4 in relation to the direction of the workpiece to be transferred is maintained zero such that workpiece 20 is linearly and horizontally transferred.

[0033] Also, in the embodiment shown in Figures 12 and 13, second arm 31 and third arm 32 do not cross while transferring workpiece 20 from processing device 6; however, it is possible to transfer workpiece 20 by crossing the arms. As shown in Figures 14 (A), (B), during transfer of workpiece 20, third arm 32 is superimposed over second arm 31, and workpiece 20 is continually transferred by rotating arms. In this case, the lengths of axial distances of each arm L1, L2, L3 are not limited to the above; however, as shown in Figure 14 (B), when workpiece 20 is transferred while offset length is zero, it is required to establish a condition where $(L2 - L3) \leq L1$. When the position of first rotational axis 2a is appropriately established, workpiece 20 can be transferred on a line on which offset length D is between zero and the maximum of $(L1 + L2 - L3)$.

[0034] According to articulated robot 1 with a structure as described above, the position of first rotational axis 2a is shifted to an appropriate position where a distance to the path of the center of workpiece 20 is sufficiently maintained; therefore, the workpiece can be linearly transferred at a position where center of workpiece 20c is distant from first rotational axis 2a. As a result, singularities do not tend to be generated during the linear movement of workpiece 20; also, no unnatural movement is caused in each link when workpiece 20 is transferred at a constant speed.

[0035] Furthermore, first arm portion 22 of this embodiment is formed of a turn table such that generation of dust is minimized during rotational shift of second arm 31, and space required for the design is reduced.

[0036] Also, in the above embodiment, when hand portion 4 is linearly moved, the direction of the axis of hand portion 4 and the direction of the workpiece to be transferred are the same. However, as shown in Figure 15, by transferring the workpiece while axis 4c of hand portion 4 is tilted in relation to the direction of the workpiece to be transferred, it is possible to remove workpiece 20 from a position located further than as in the above embodiment for transfer. However, in this case, it is necessary to prevent interference of hand portion 4 and processing device 6; additionally, the angle of axis 4c shall be constant in order to transfer workpiece 20 without rotation.

[0037] As is apparent from the above, in an articulated robot of the present invention, a positioning portion for a workpiece and sensor portion to detect positional devi-

ations of the workpiece are positioned at a transferring portion such that detection by the sensor portion while the workpiece is positioned at the positioning portion and transfer of the workpiece by the transferring portion thereat. Hence, transfer of the workpiece and detection of the positional deviations of the workpiece can be performed independently. As a result, the positional deviations of the workpiece are detected while the workpiece is transferred such that a time required for transfer of the workpiece from a cassette to a processing device, or vice versa can be shortened. Additionally, both the positioning portion for the workpiece and the sensor portion are formed on the articulated robot such that a space can be effectively used compared to an articulated robot from which the two portions are formed separate.

[0038] Also, in the articulated robot of the present invention, a chain connection is formed by links among a first arm portion, second arm, third arm and hand portion to transfer a workpiece; additionally, rotation of each link is independently controlled such that a first rotational axis as the rotational axis of the second arm can be rotationally shifted by rotating the first arm portion. Therefore, generation of singularities can be prevented during transfer of the workpiece. As a result, the workpiece at various locations can be linearly transferred without causing unnatural movements in the arm portions; furthermore, the speed at which the workpiece is transferred can be maintained constant.

[0039] Moreover, in the articulated robot of the present invention, the first arm portion is formed of a turn table such that generation of dust is minimized; also, the robot is space-effective. Therefore, it is suitable for a use in a clean room.

[0040] While the foregoing description and drawings represent the preferred embodiments of the present invention, it will be obvious to those skilled in the art that various changes and modifications may be made therein without departing from the true spirit and scope of the present invention.

Claims

1. An articulated robot comprising:

a movable first transferring portion;
a second transferring portion being movably supported in relation to said movable first transferring portion by a joint portion;
a workpiece being positioned at a position, where a workpiece positional deviation detecting means is located, by a hand portion formed at an end of said second transferring portion;
said workpiece positional deviation detecting means for detecting the amount of deviation in the position of said workpiece;
a positioning portion of said workpiece and a sensor portion for detecting deviations of said workpiece being formed at one of said first

transferring portion and said second transferring portion, which form said articulated robot; and

5 a detecting operation by said sensor portion and transferring of said first and second transferring portions being enabled when said workpiece is positioned at said positioning portion of said articulated robot.

10 2. The articulated robot described in Claim 1 wherein:

said positioning portion comprises a rotating means to rotate said mounted workpiece; and
15 said sensor portion for detecting a given position of the end of said workpiece.

3. The articulated robot described in Claim 2 wherein:

20 said second transferring portion is formed by a second arm and a third arm, which is connected to said second arm; and
said positioning portion and said sensor portion being formed either at said first transferring portion or at said second arm.

25 4. The articulated robot described in Claim 3 wherein:

said first transferring portion is a slide transferring portion; and
30 said second arm, said third arm and said hand portion being rotatably connected to said slide transferring portion by joint portions.

35 5. The articulated robot described in Claim 3 wherein:

said first transferring portion is a turn table; and
35 said turn table being rotatably connected to said second arm, said third arm and said hand portion by joint portions.

40 6. The articulated robot described in Claim 3 wherein:

said transferring portion is a turntable;
45 a first rotational axis being formed at a position eccentric in relation to the rotational center of said turn table which is assigned as a first arm portion;
an arm, which is rotatably supported by said first rotational axis, being assigned as a second arm;
50 a third arm being rotatably supported at an end of said second arm;
a hand portion being rotatably supported at an end of said third arm; and
55 generation of singularities being prevented by separately controlling rotations of said first arm portion, said second arm said third arm and said hand portion.

7. The articulated robot described in Claim 6 wherein said second arm and said third arm carry out linear movement of said hand portion while said hand portion is positioned to face one direction such that generation of singularities is prevented by controlling the rotation of said first arm portion.

8. The articulated robot described in Claim 7 wherein generation of singularities is prevented by shifting the position of said rotational axis until a sufficient distance with a path of linear movement of said hand portion is obtained.

9. The articulated robot described in Claim 8 wherein the following is true:

$$(L_2 - L_3) \leq L_1:$$

where:

L₁ = distance between axes of said first arm portion;

L₂ = distance between axes of said second arm; and

L₃ = distance between axes of said third arm.

10. An articulated robot comprising:

two arms being rotatably connected by a joint portion;

a workpiece being positioned at a positioning portion of a workpiece positional deviation detecting means by a hand portion formed at an end of one of said two arms, which is located further than other, such that the amount of deviation in the position of said workpiece is detected;

a positioning portion of said workpiece and a sensor portion for detecting positional deviations of said workpiece being formed on one of said two arms, which is located toward the bottom; and

a detecting operation by said sensor portion and transfer of said first and second transferring portions being performed while said workpiece is positioned at said positioning portion.

11. An articulated robot comprising:

a first rotational axis being formed at a position eccentric in relation to the rotational center of a turn table which being assigned as a first arm portion;

an arm, which is rotatably supported by said first rotational axis, being assigned as a second arm;

a third arm being rotatably supported at an end of said second arm;

5

a hand portion being rotatably supported at an end of said third arm; and
generation of singularities being prevented by separately controlling rotations of said first arm portion, said second arm said third arm and said hand portion.

10

12. The articulated robot described in Claim 11 wherein generation of singularities is prevented by shifting the position of said rotational axis until a sufficient distance with a path of linear movement of said hand portion is obtained.

15

13. The articulated robot described in Claim 12 wherein said first arm portion or said second arm is formed to be movable in the vertical direction.

20

14. The articulated robot described in Claim 11 wherein said second arm and said third arm carry out linear movement of said hand portion while said hand portion is positioned to face one direction such that generation of singularities is prevented by controlling the rotation of said first arm portion.

25

15. The articulated robot described in Claim 14 wherein the following is true:

$$(L_2 - L_3) \leq L_1:$$

30

where:

L₁ = distance between axes of said first arm portion;

L₂ = distance between axes of said second arm; and

L₃ = distance between axes of said third arm.

35

40

45

50

55

55

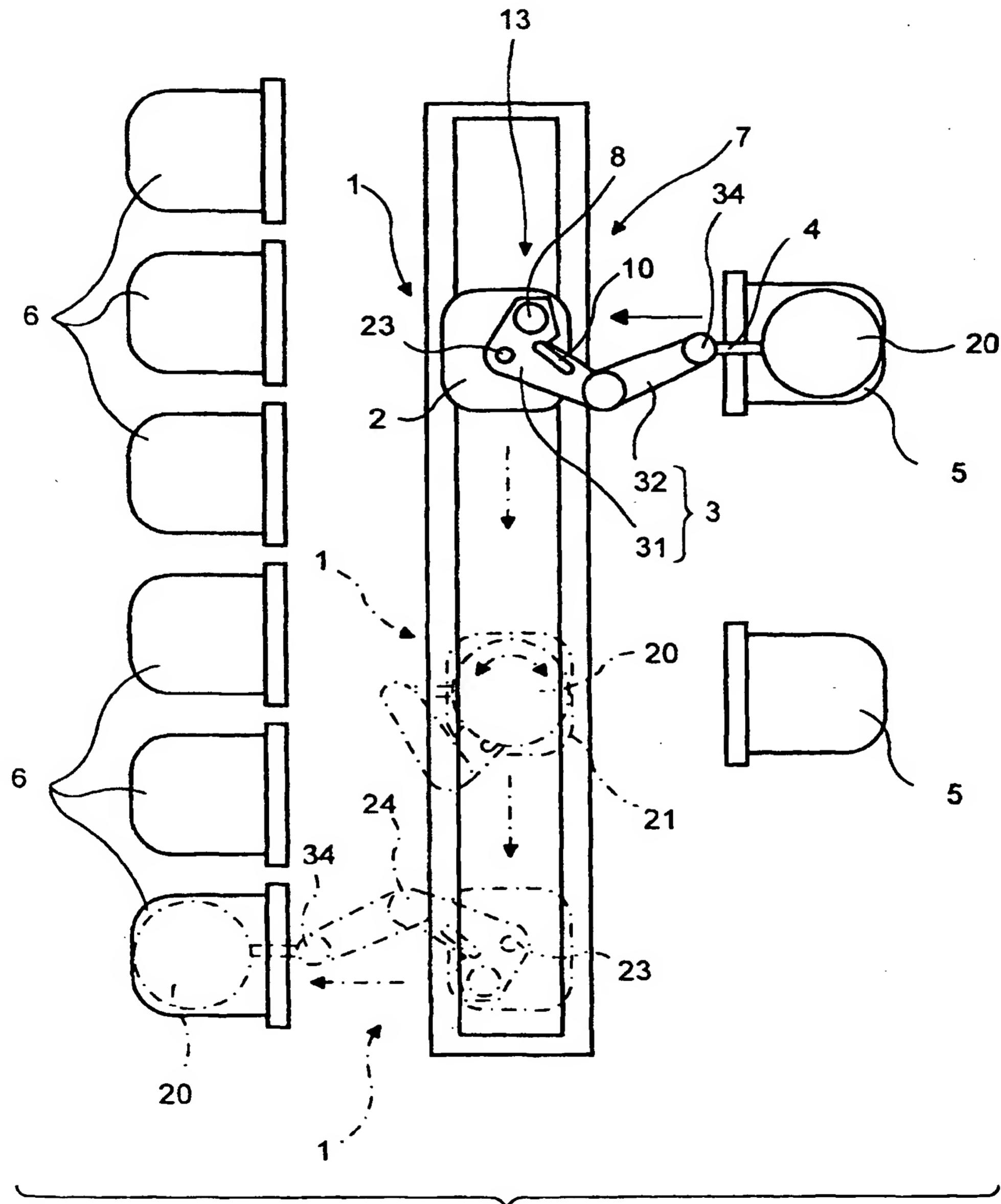


FIG. 1

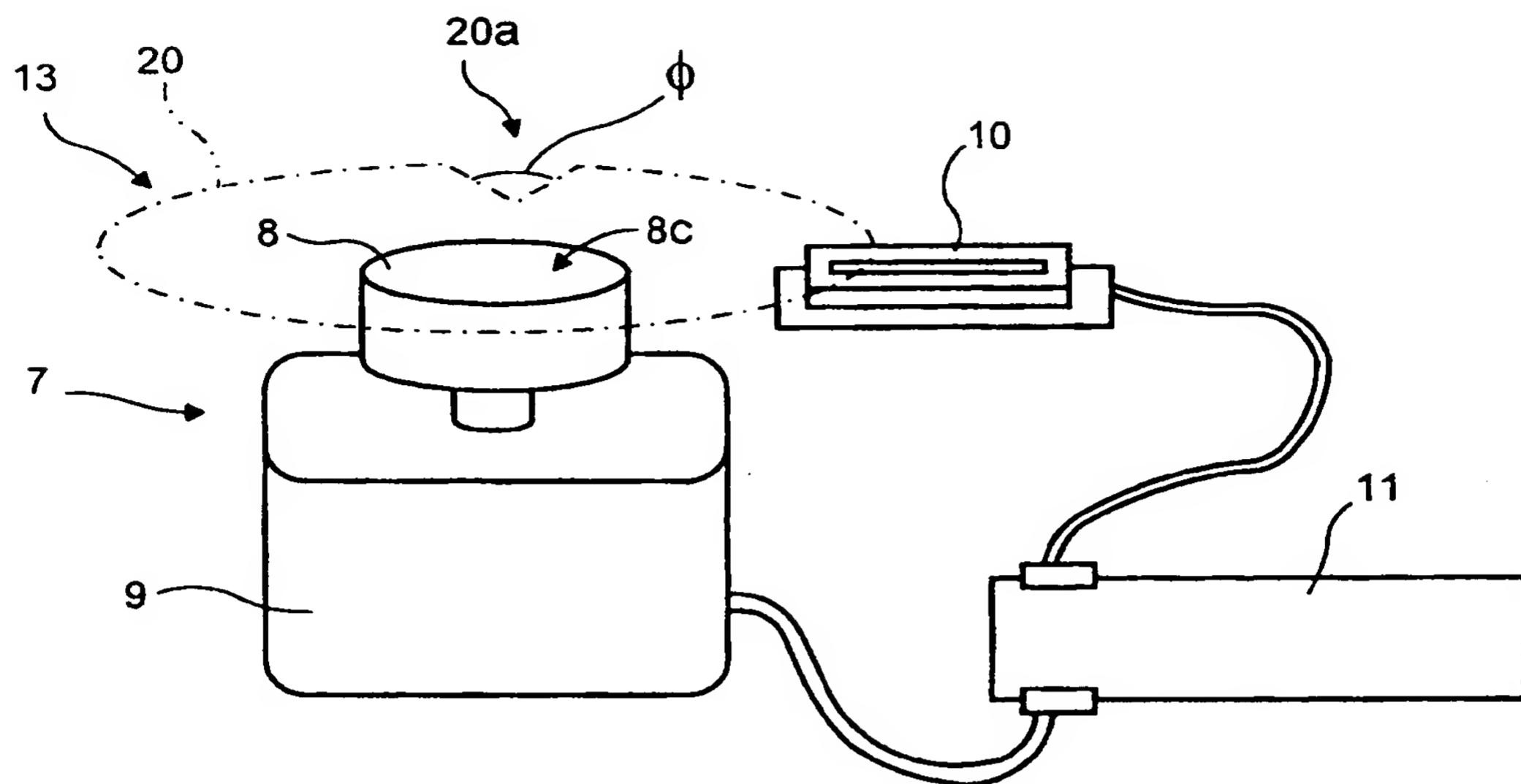


FIG. 2

CCD
OUTPUT L

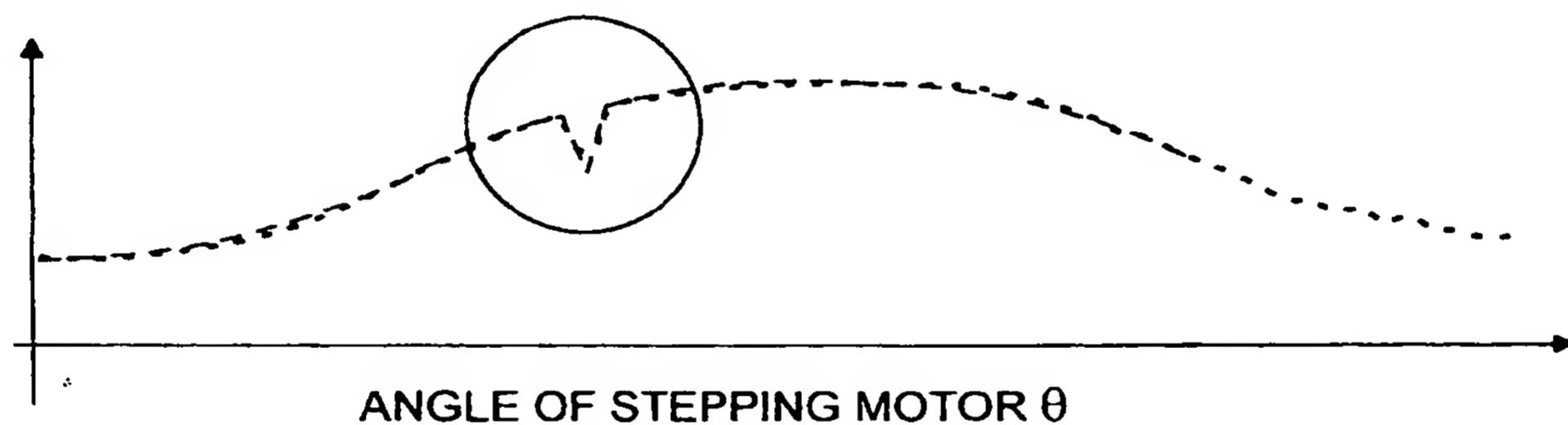


FIG. 3

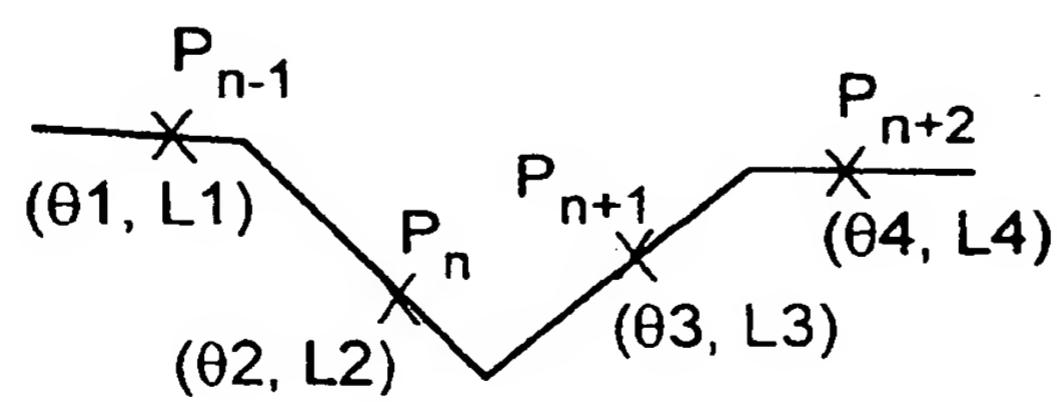


FIG. 4

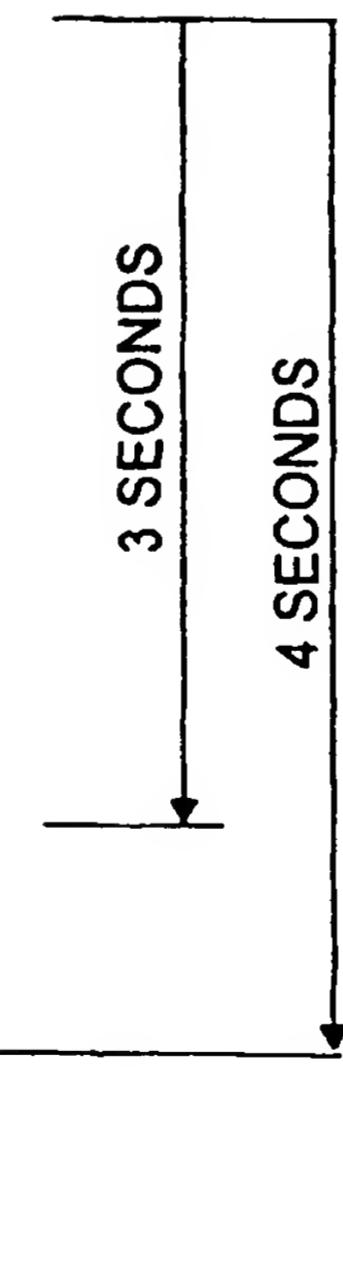
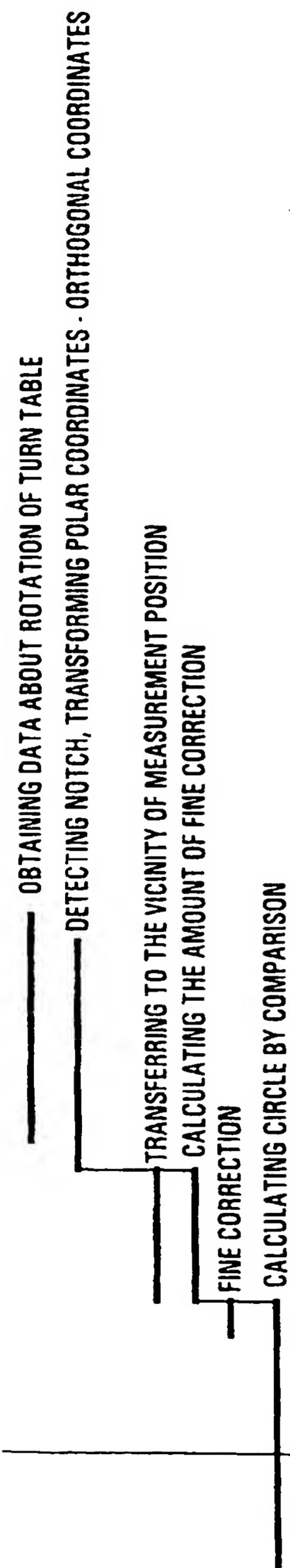


FIG. 5

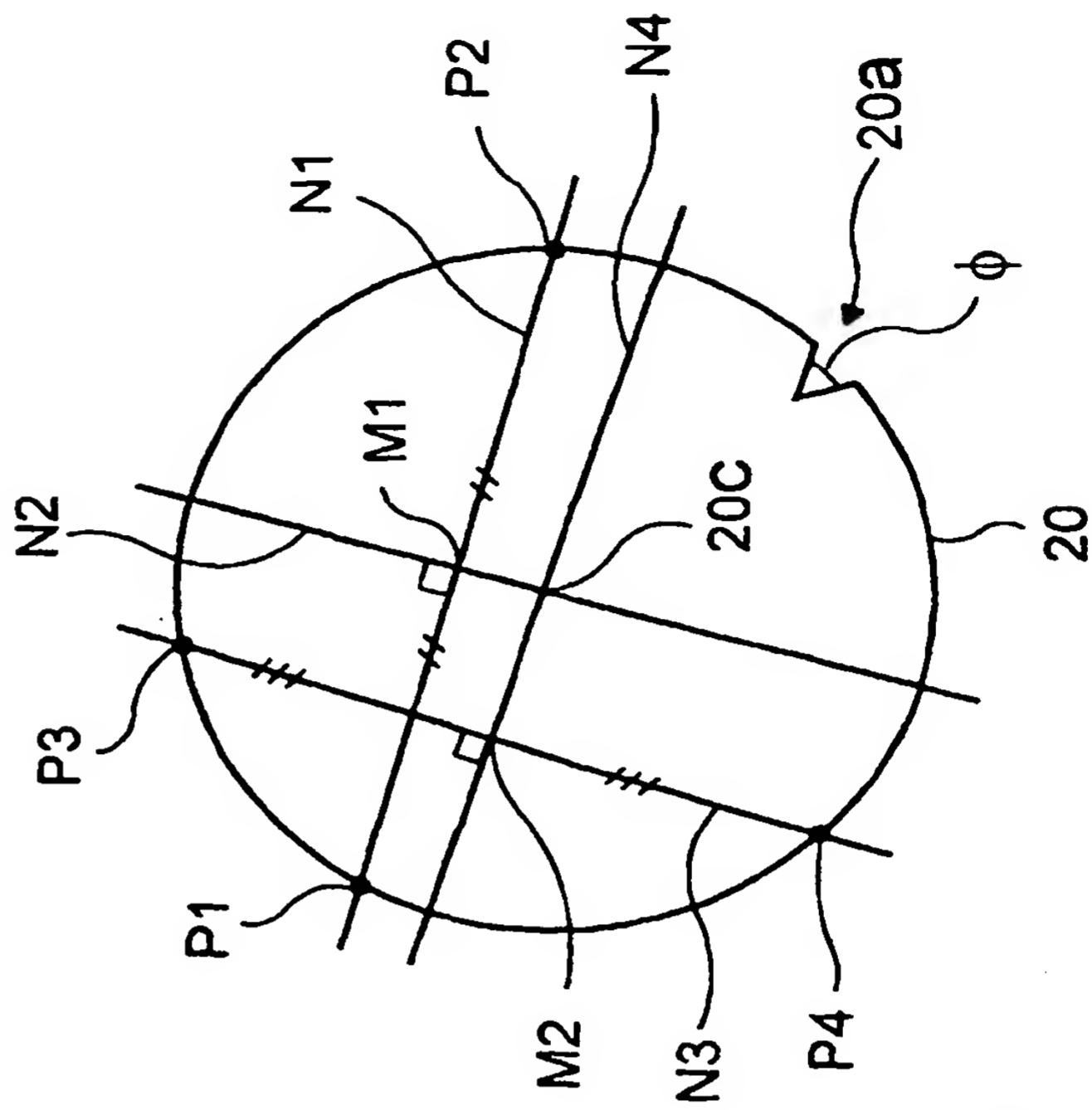


FIG. 6

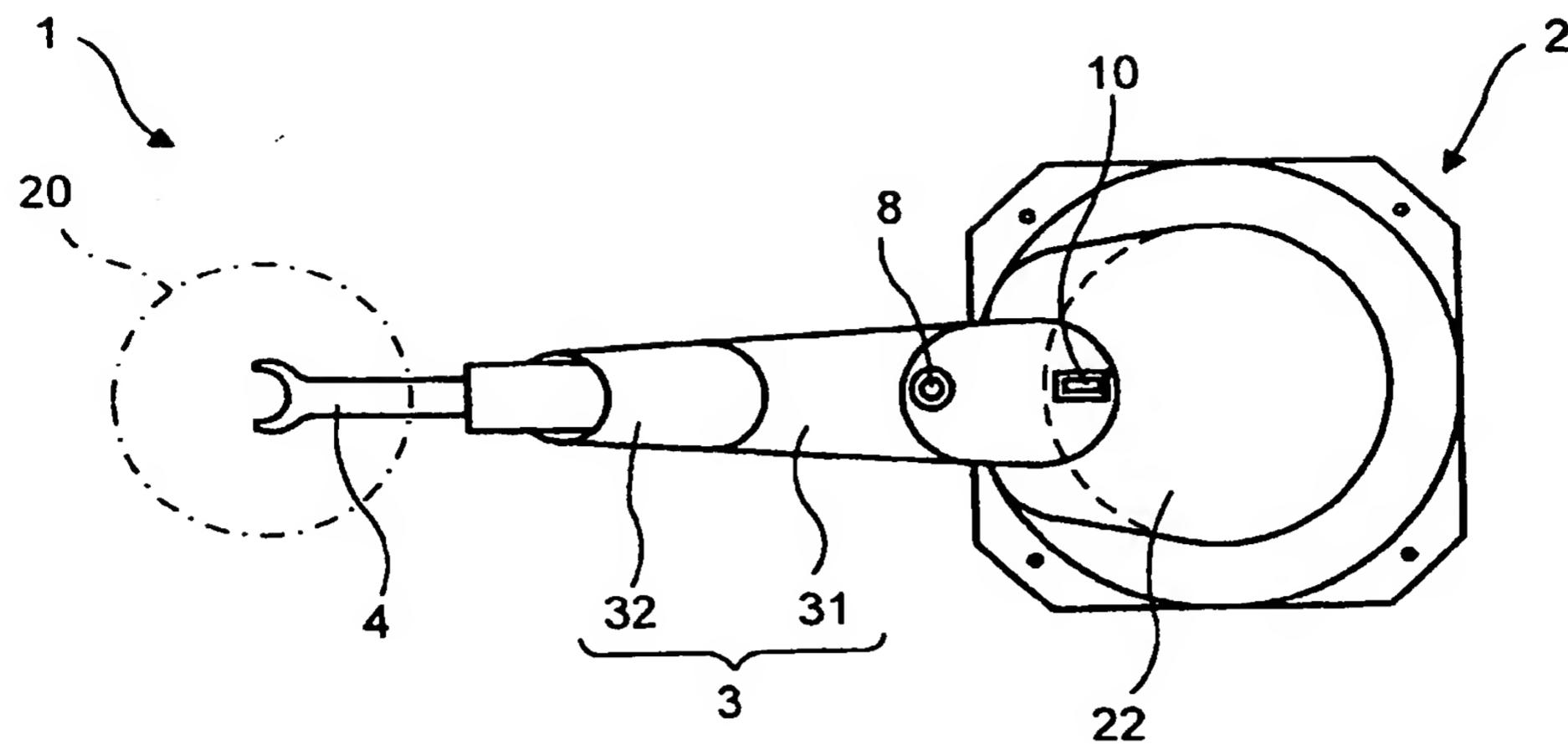


FIG. 7

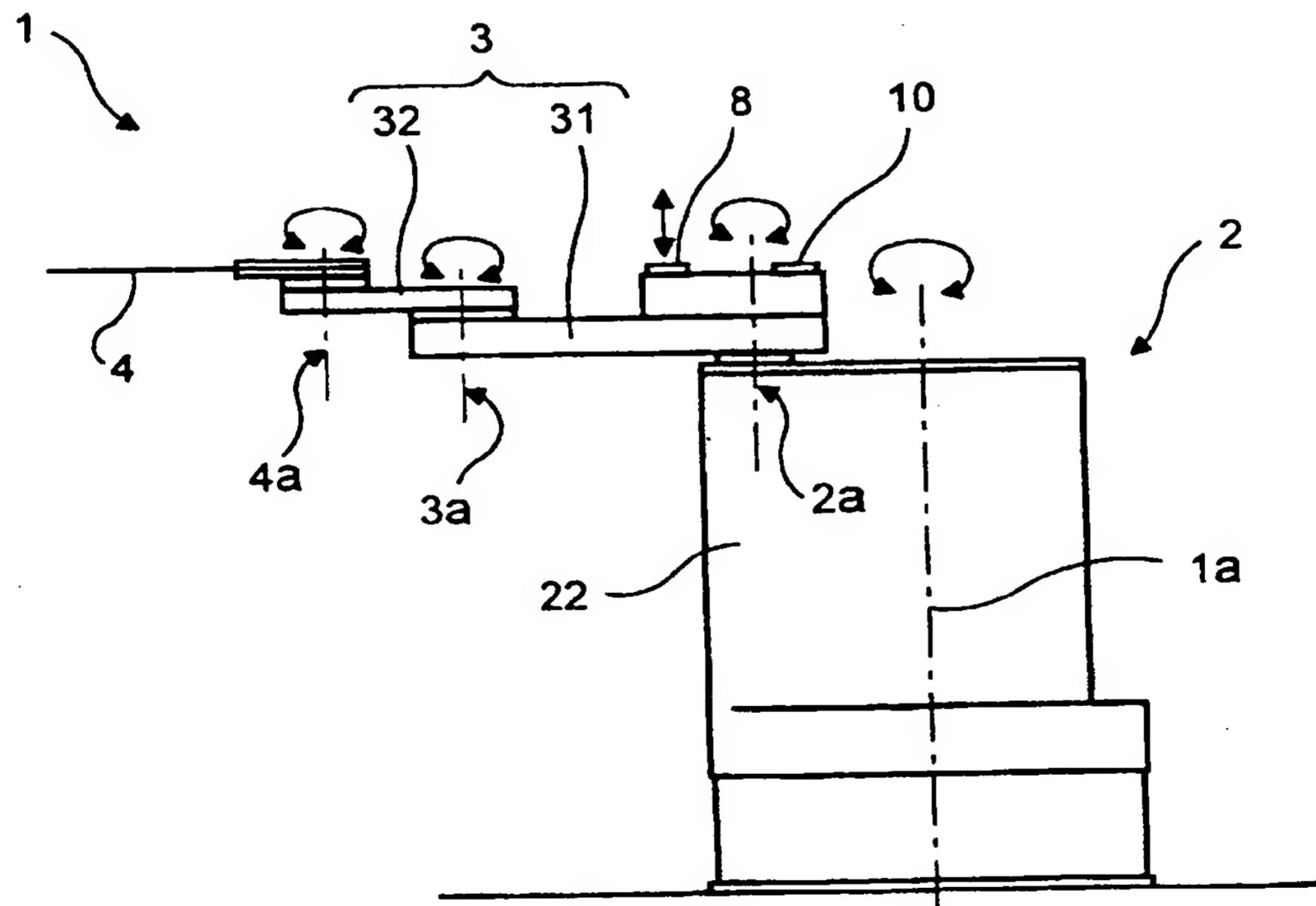


FIG. 8

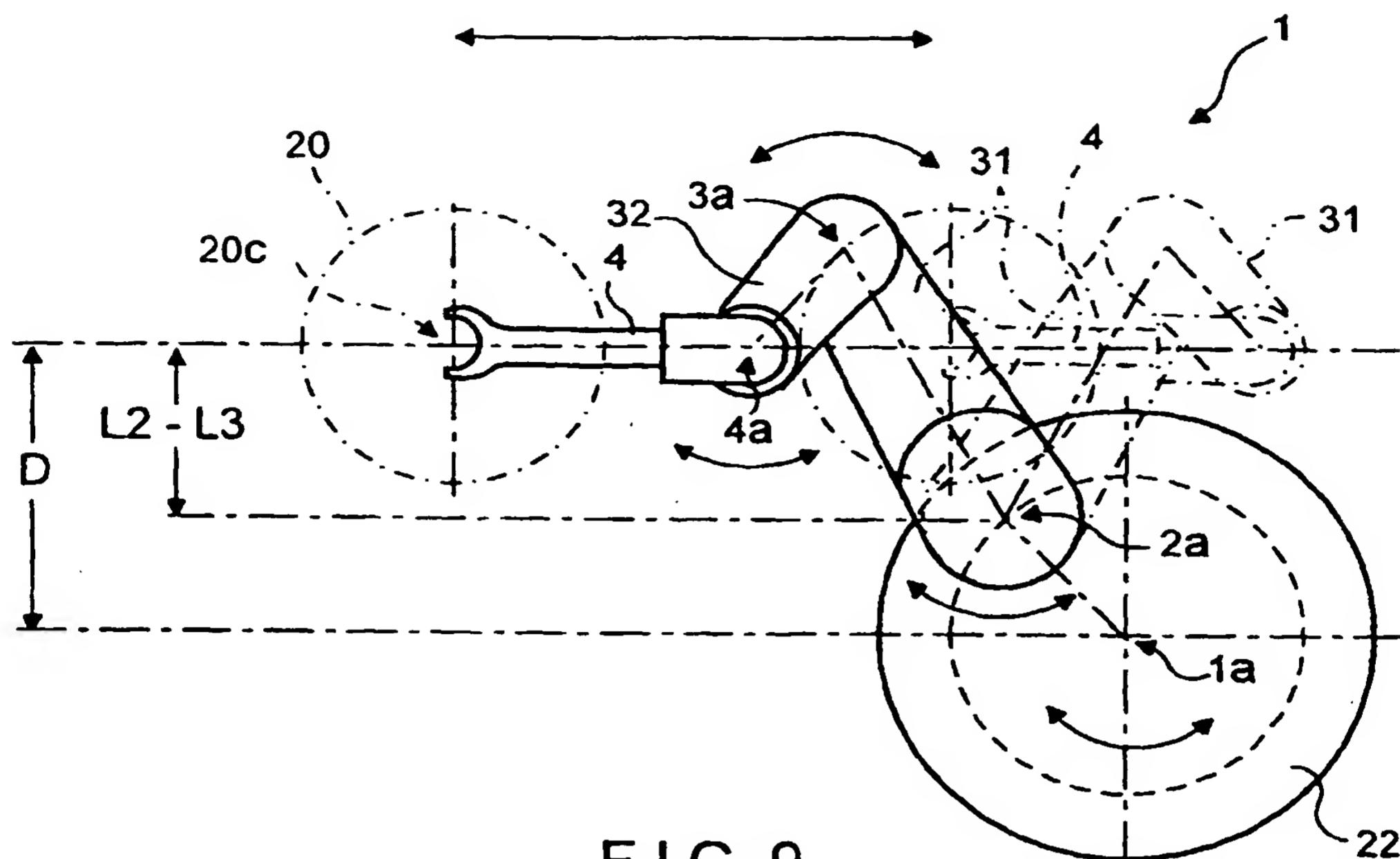


FIG. 9

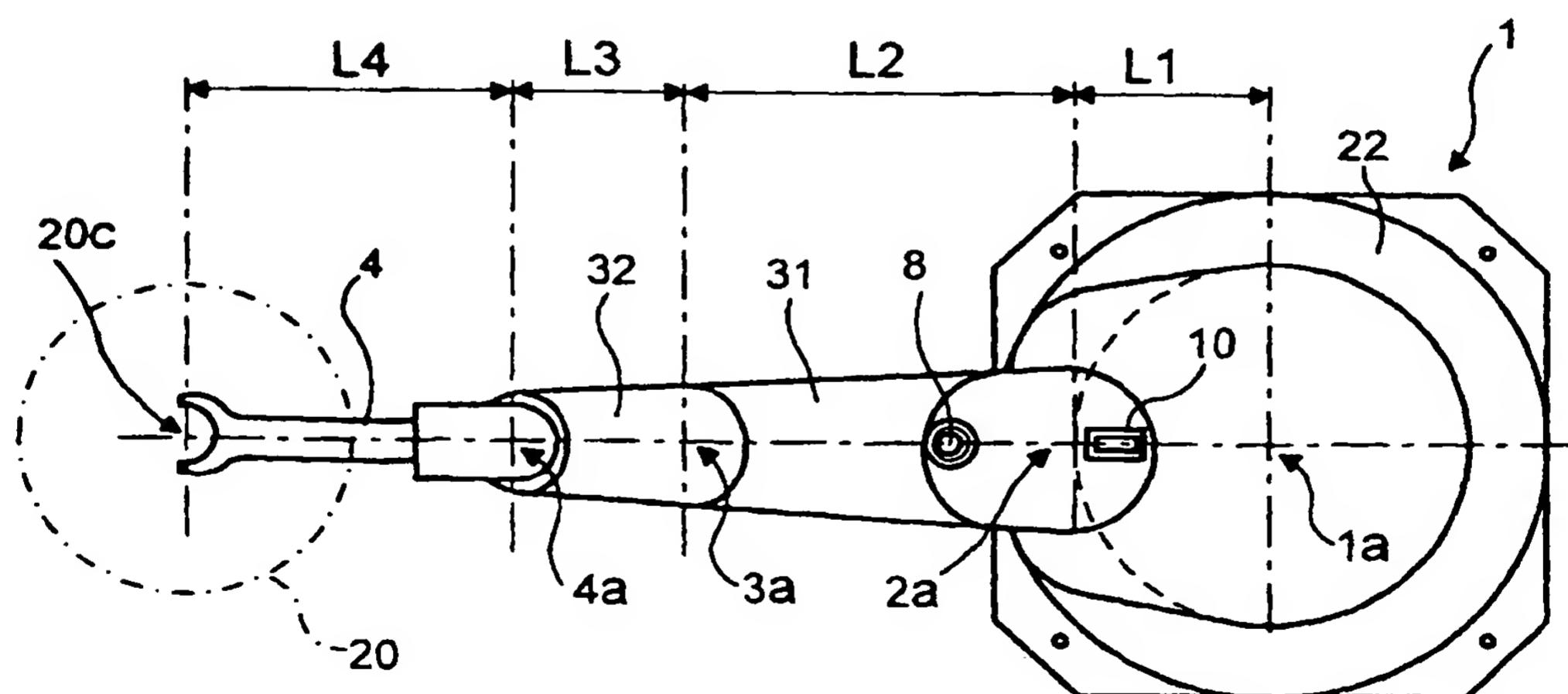


FIG. 10

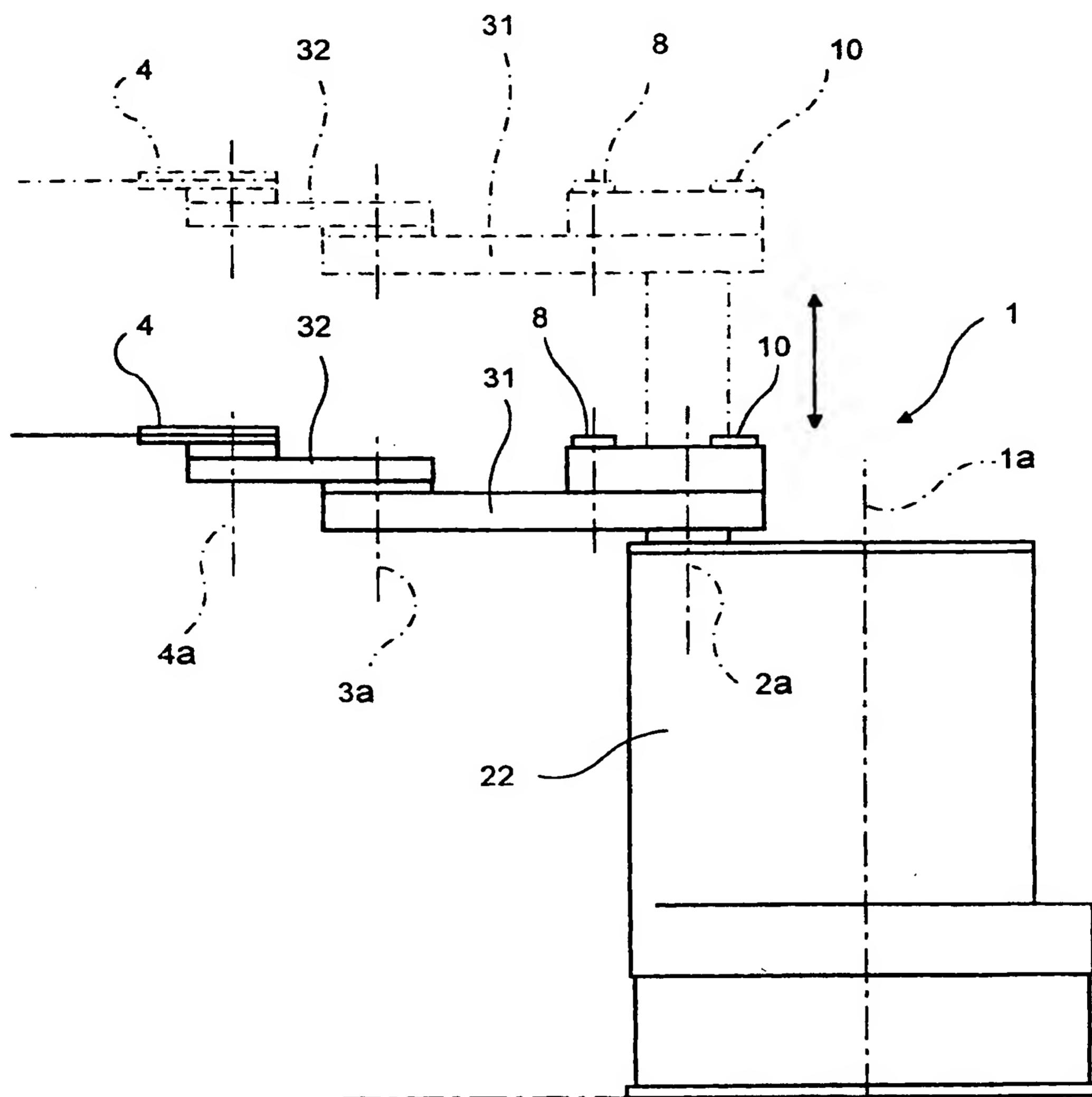


FIG. 11

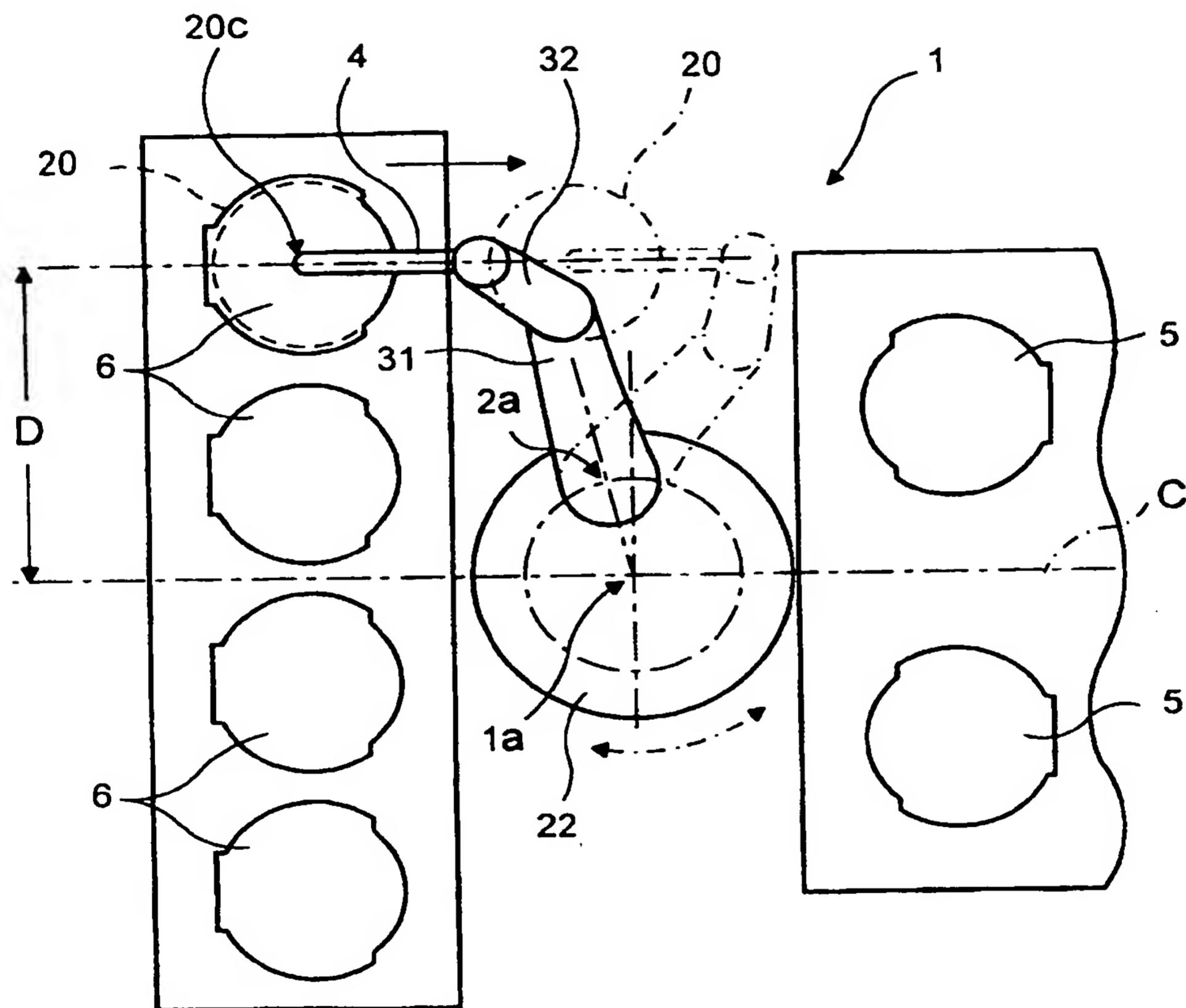


FIG. 12

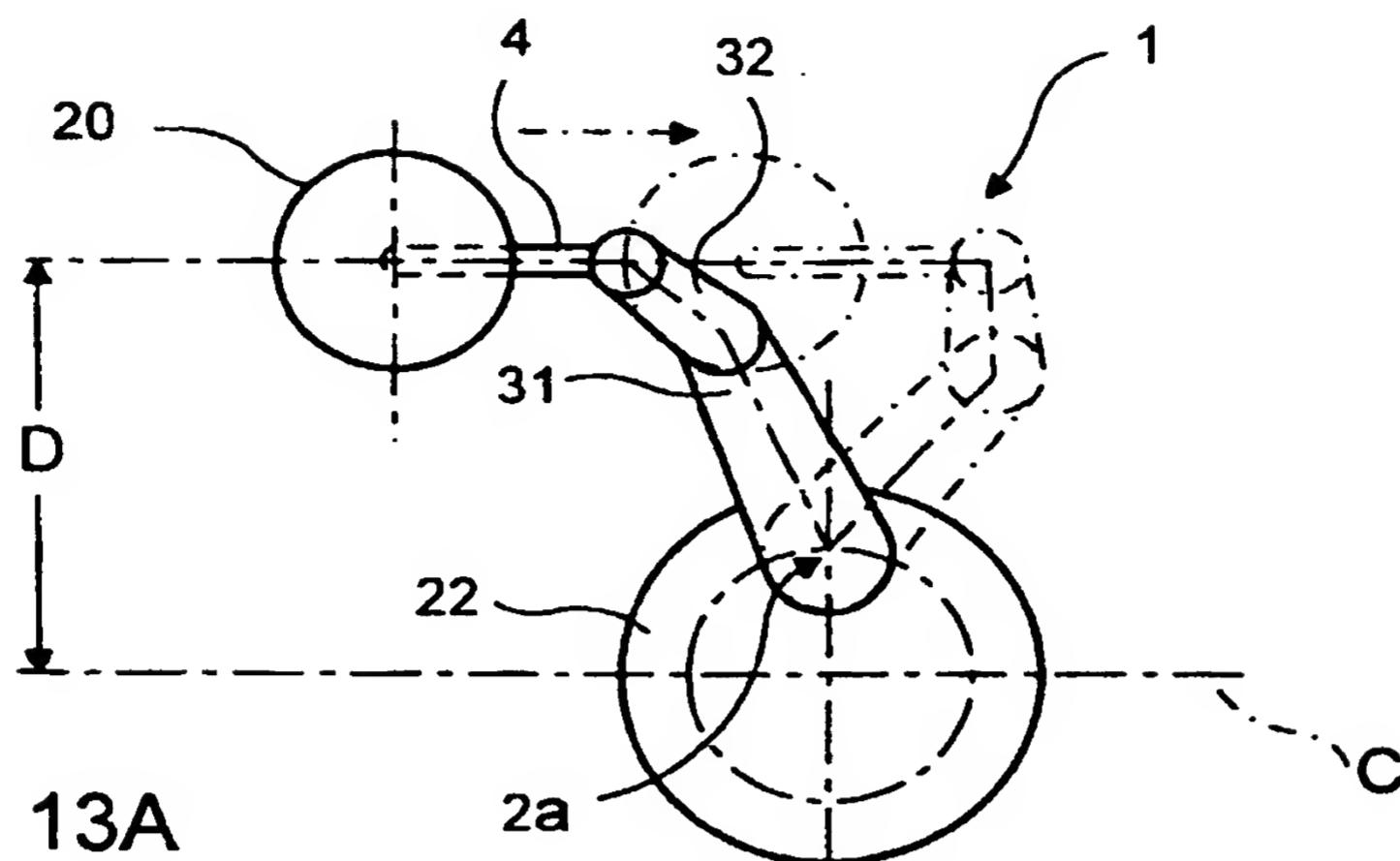


FIG. 13A

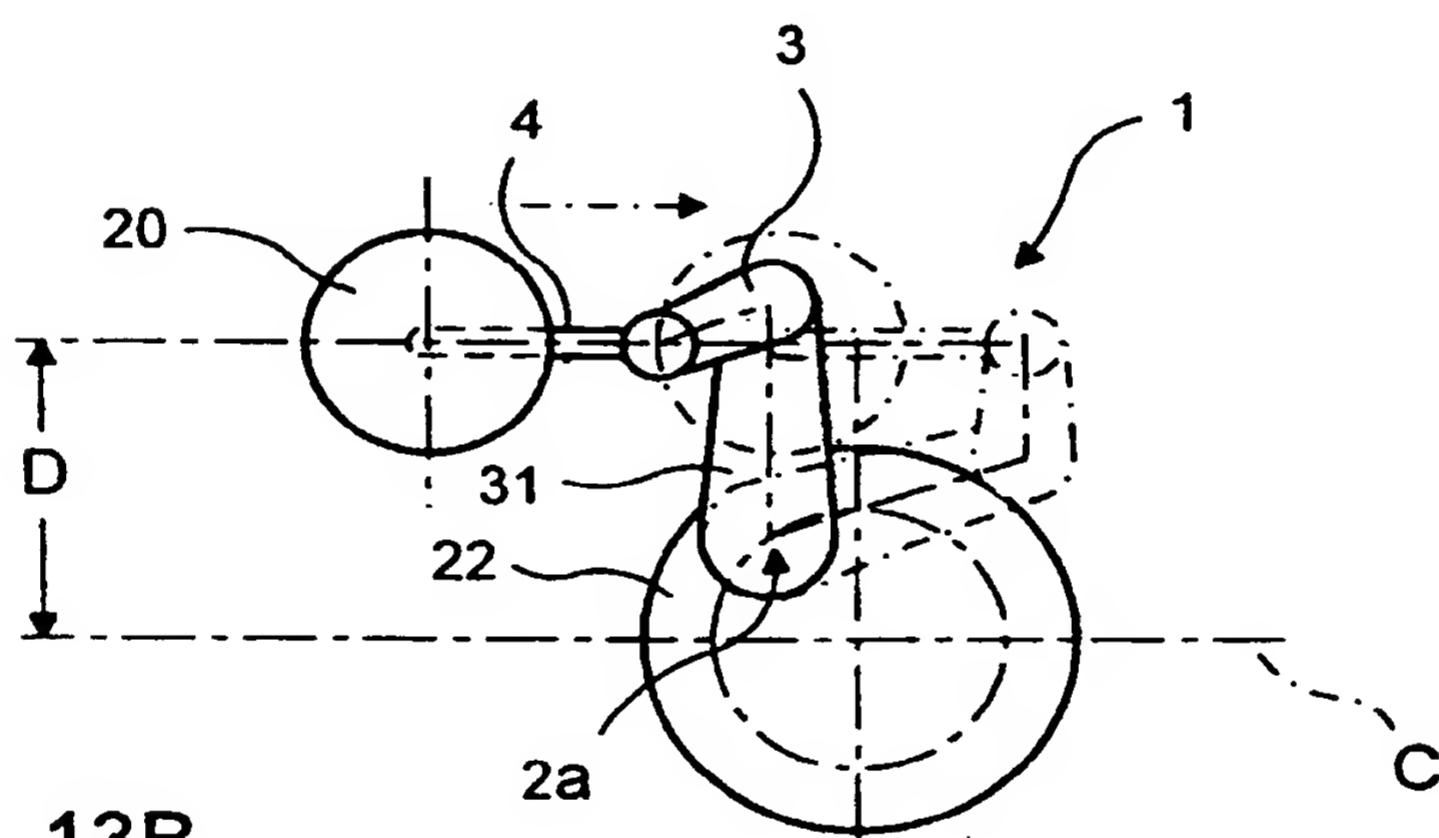


FIG. 13B

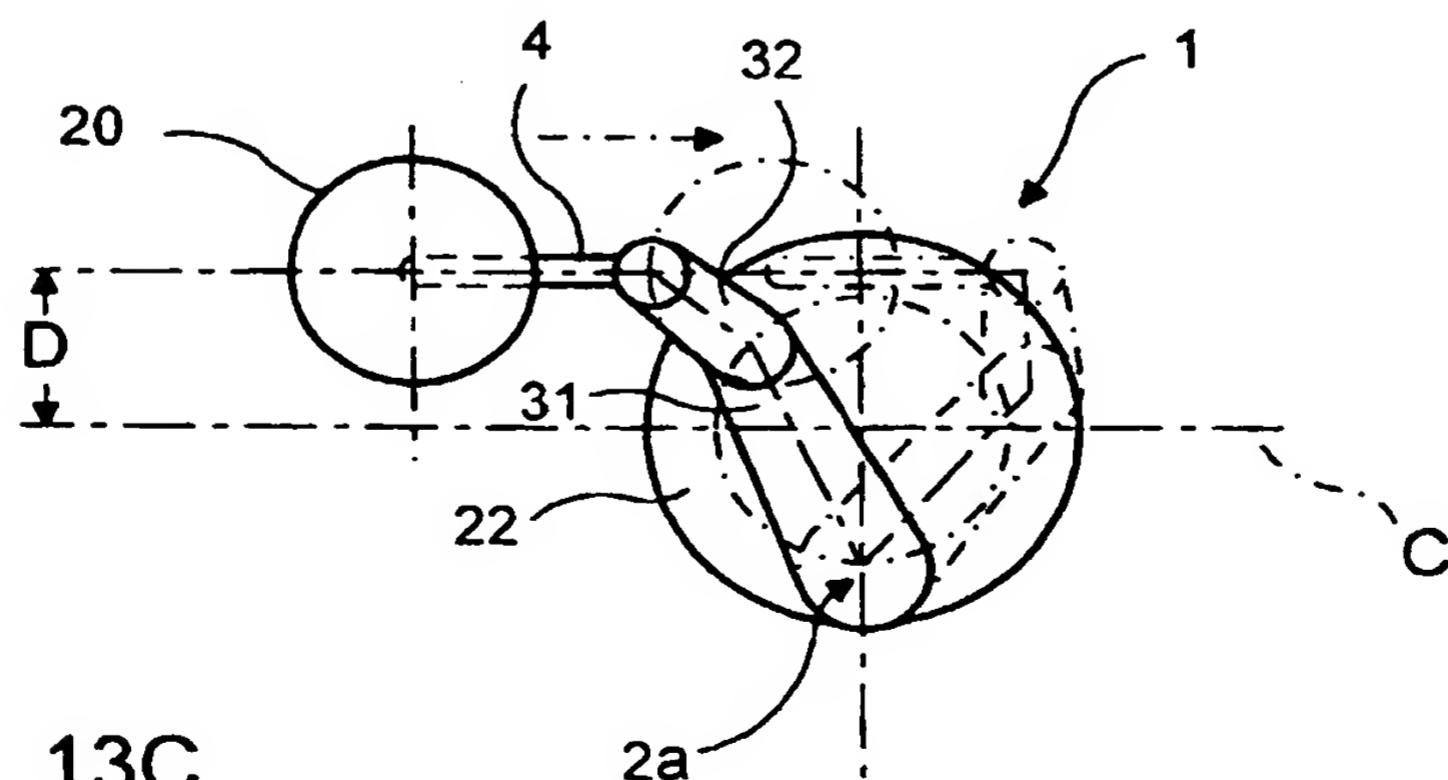


FIG. 13C

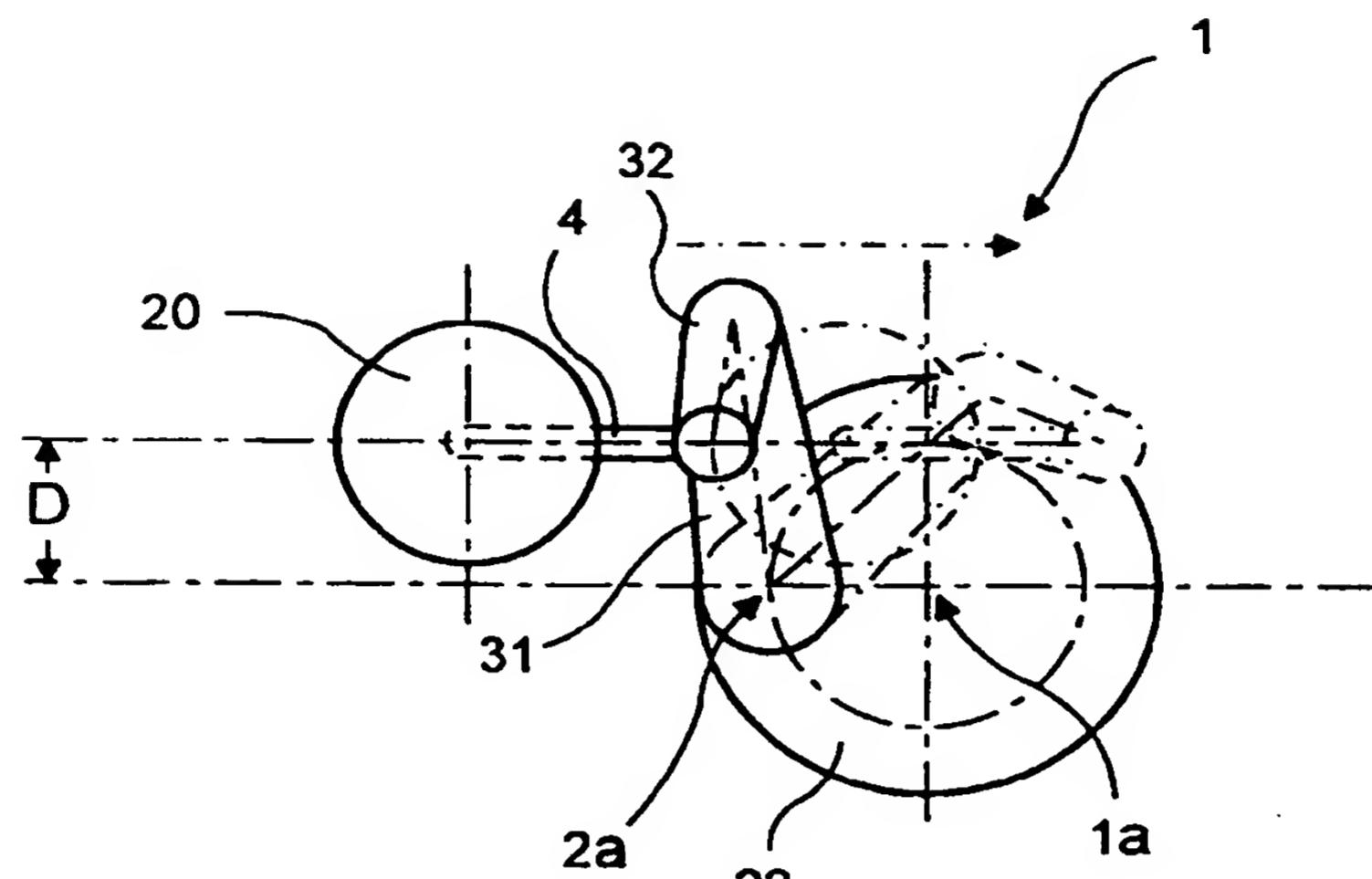


FIG. 14A

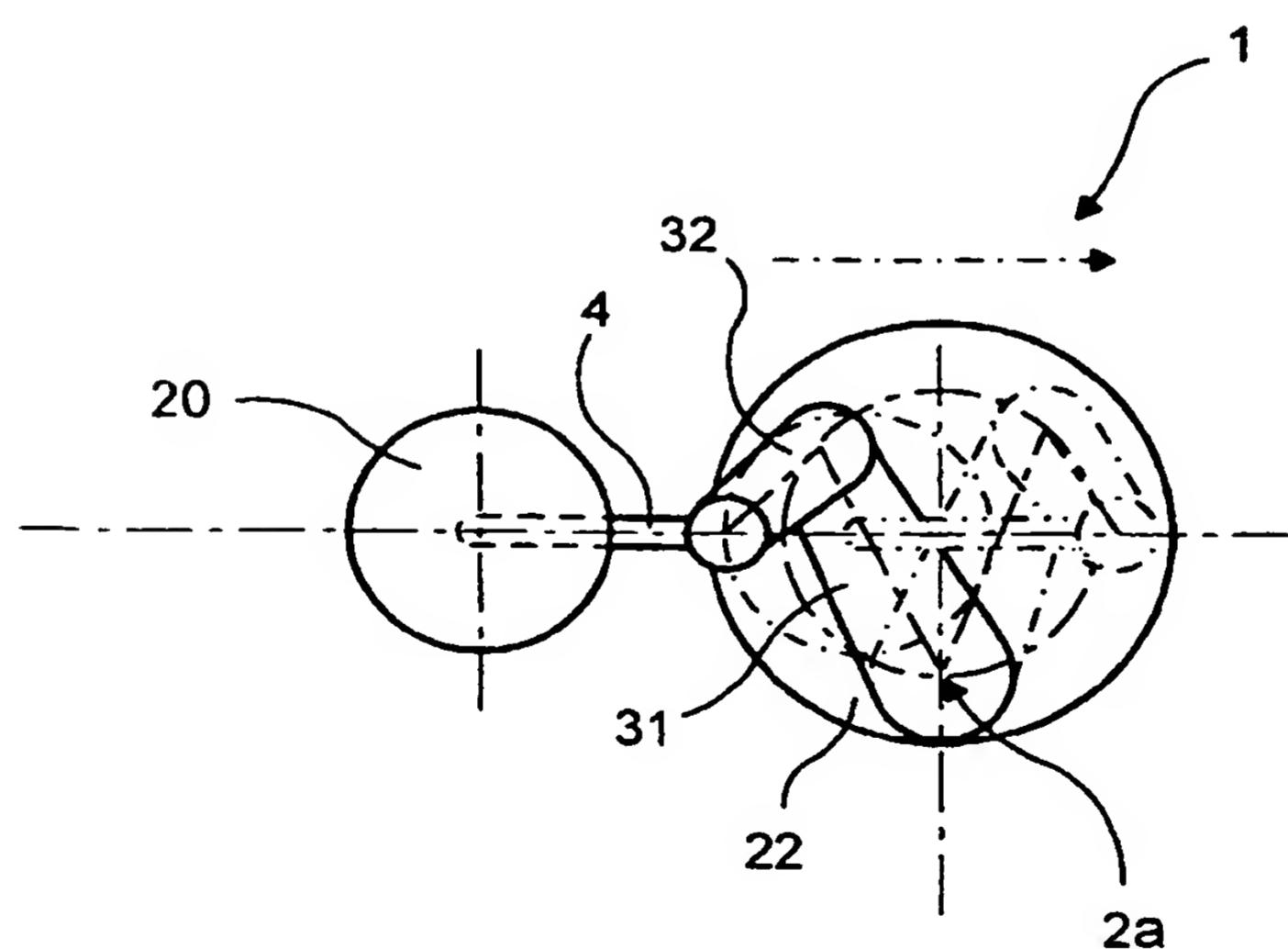


FIG. 14B

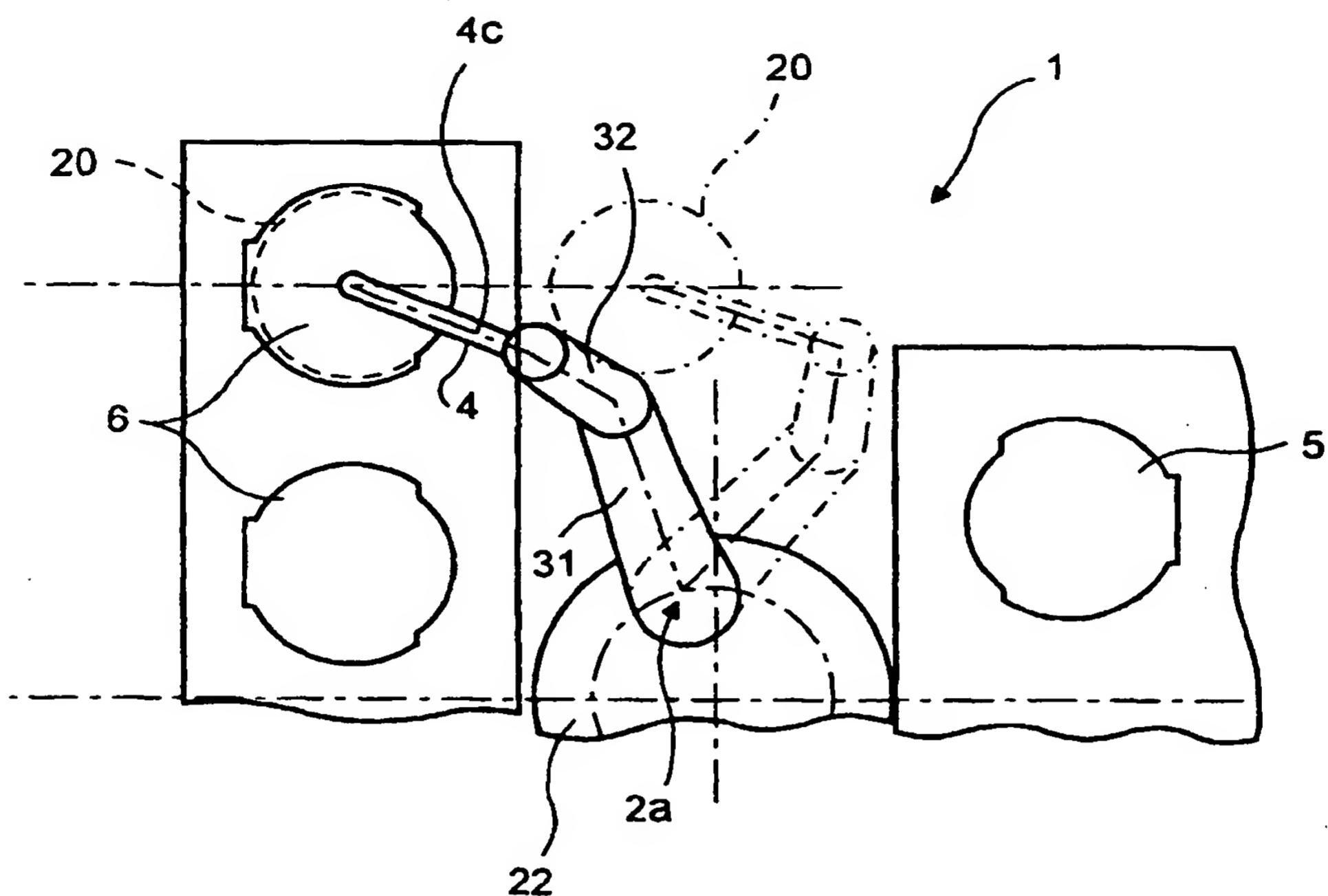


FIG. 15

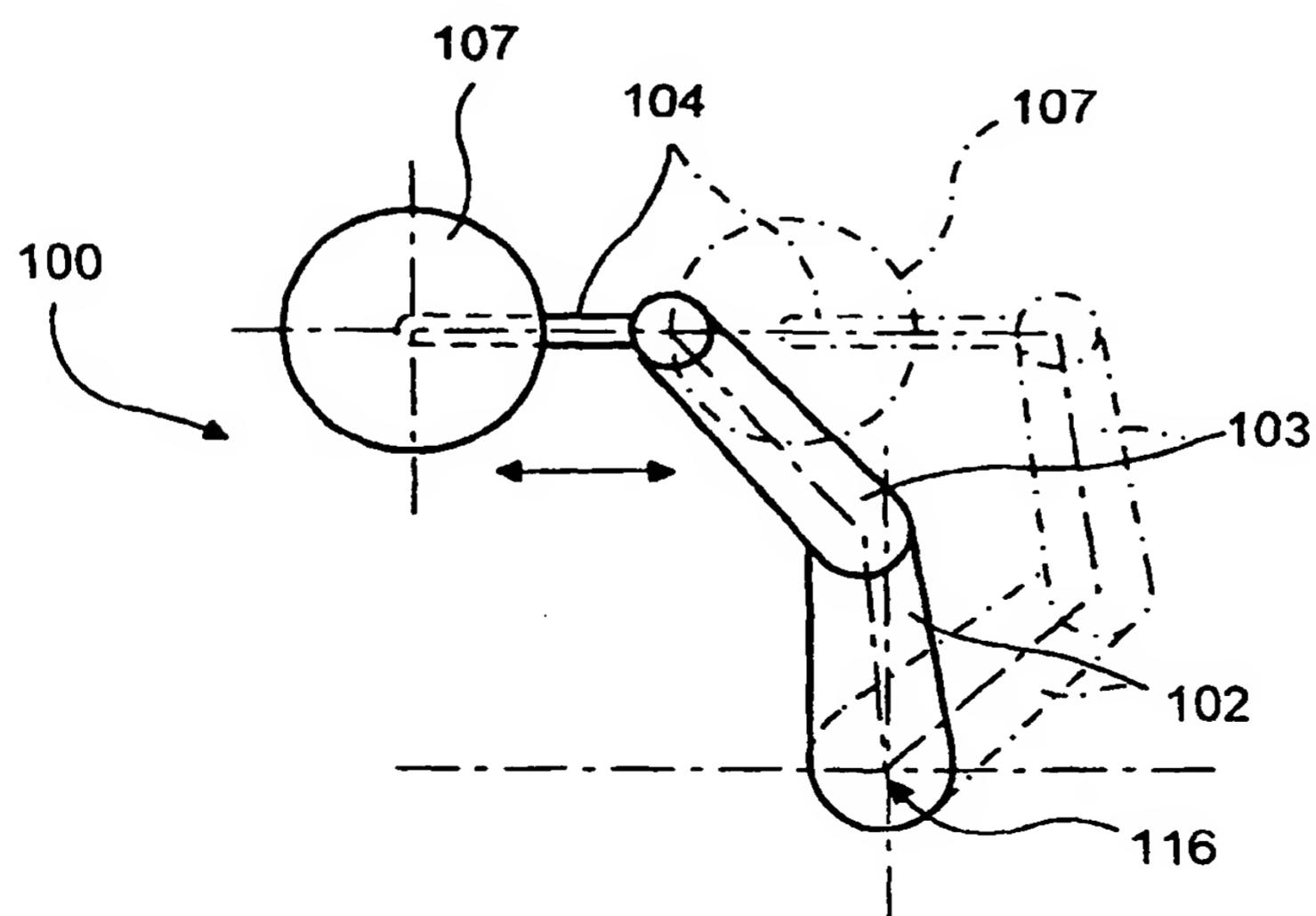


FIG. 18

FIG. 16A

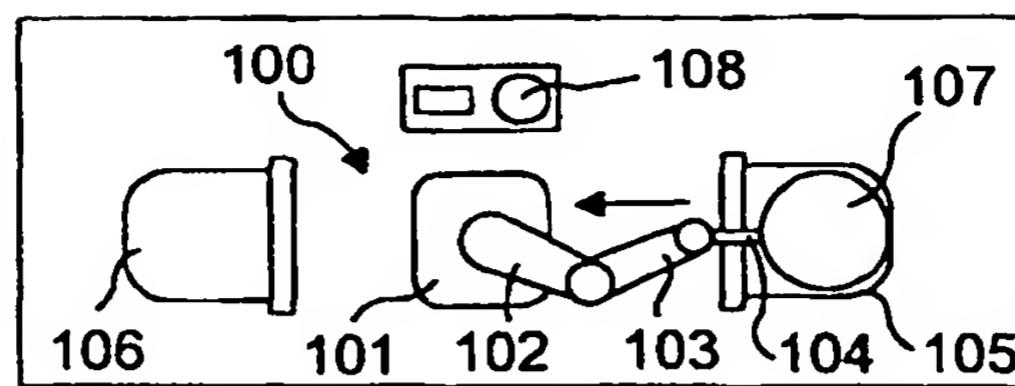


FIG. 16B

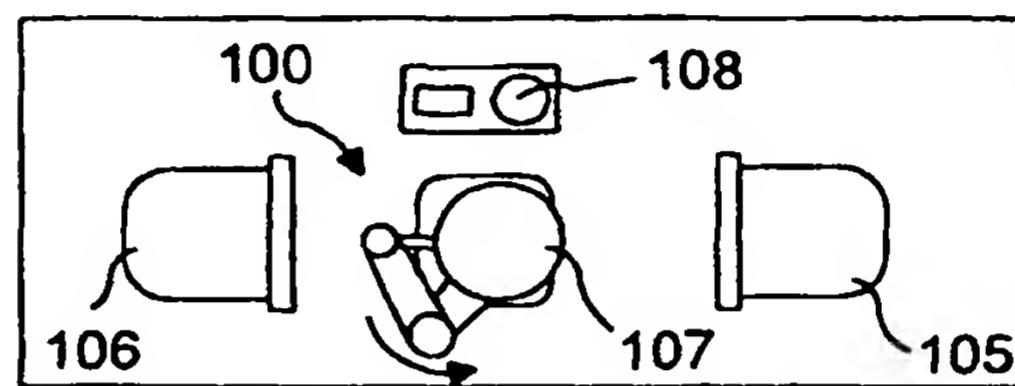


FIG. 16C

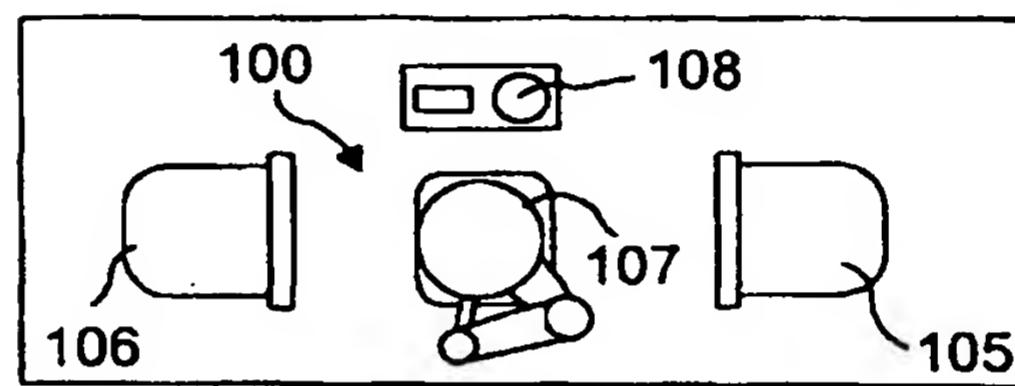


FIG. 16D

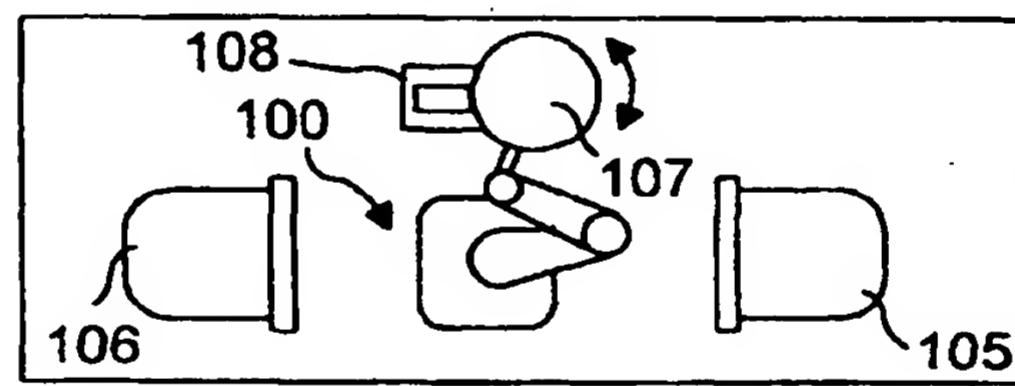


FIG. 16E

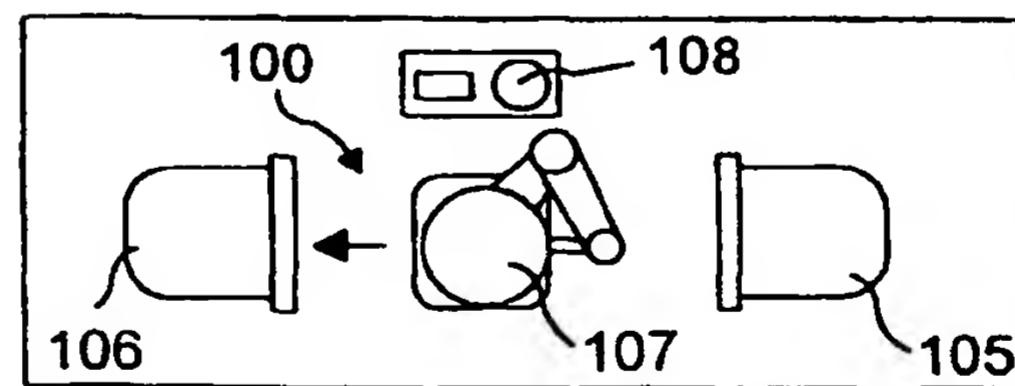
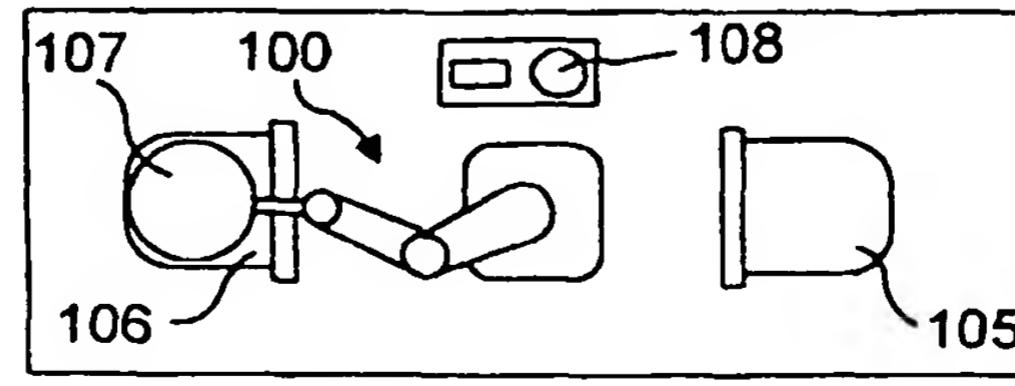


FIG. 16F



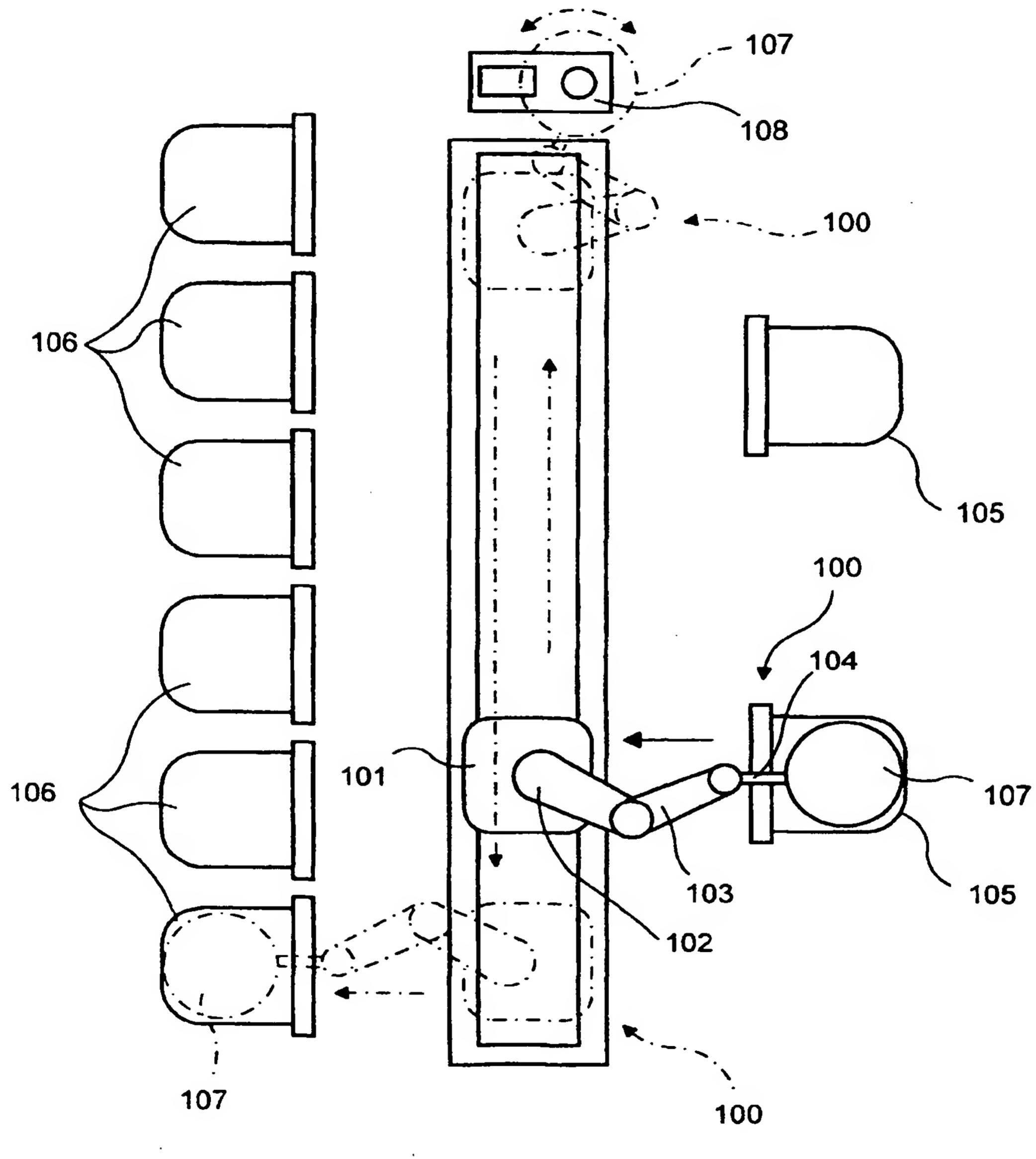


FIG. 17

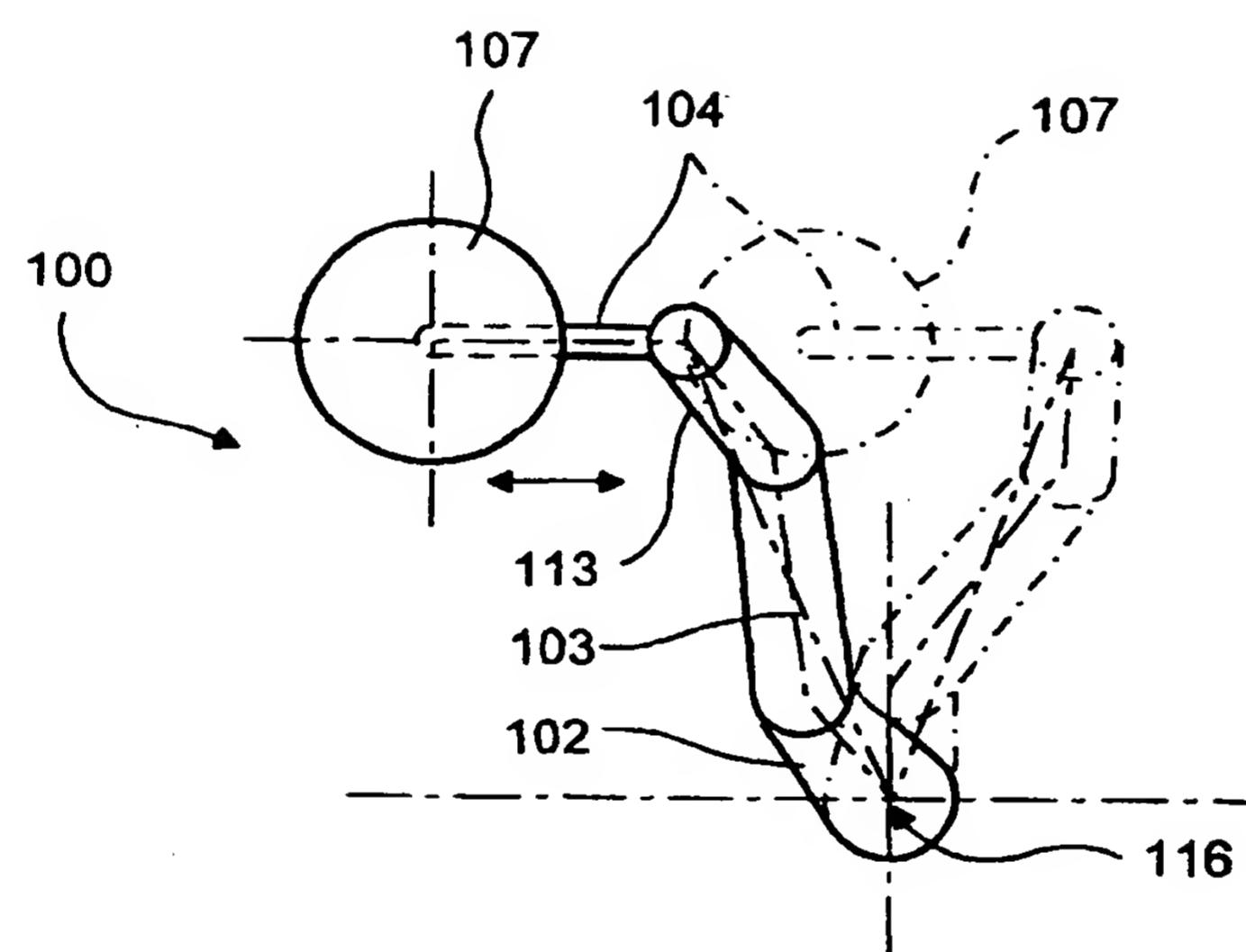


FIG. 19

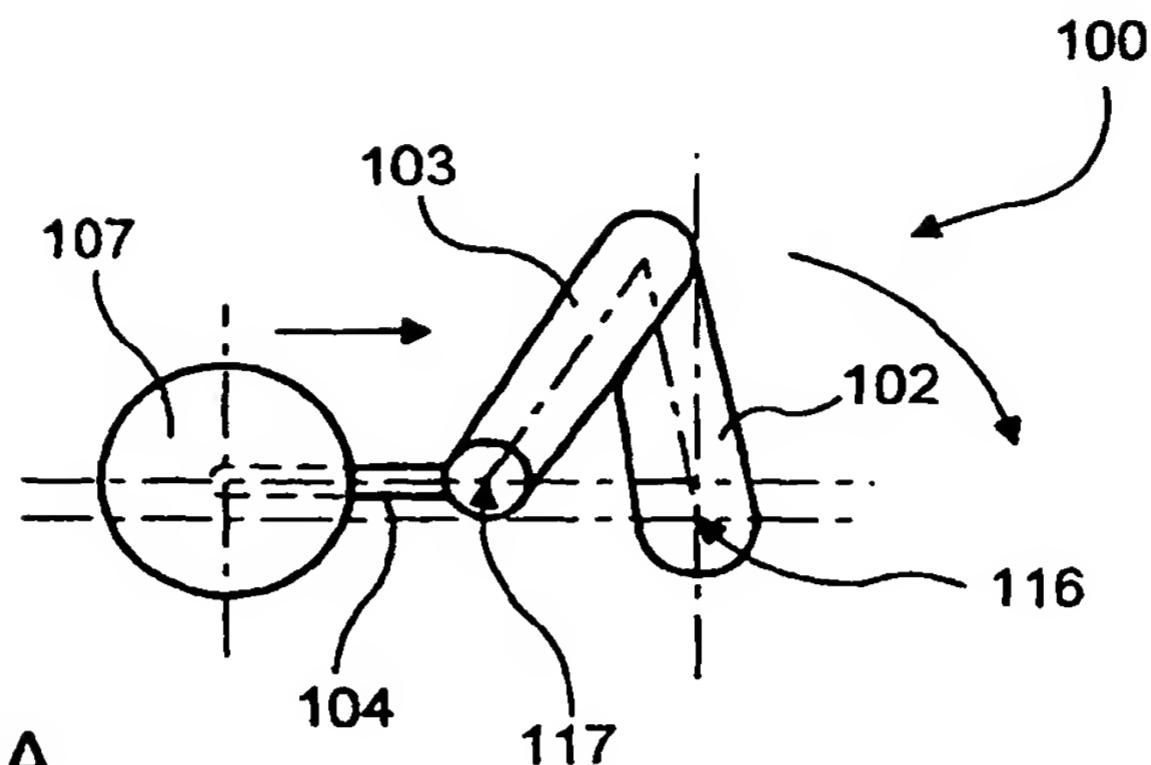


FIG. 20A

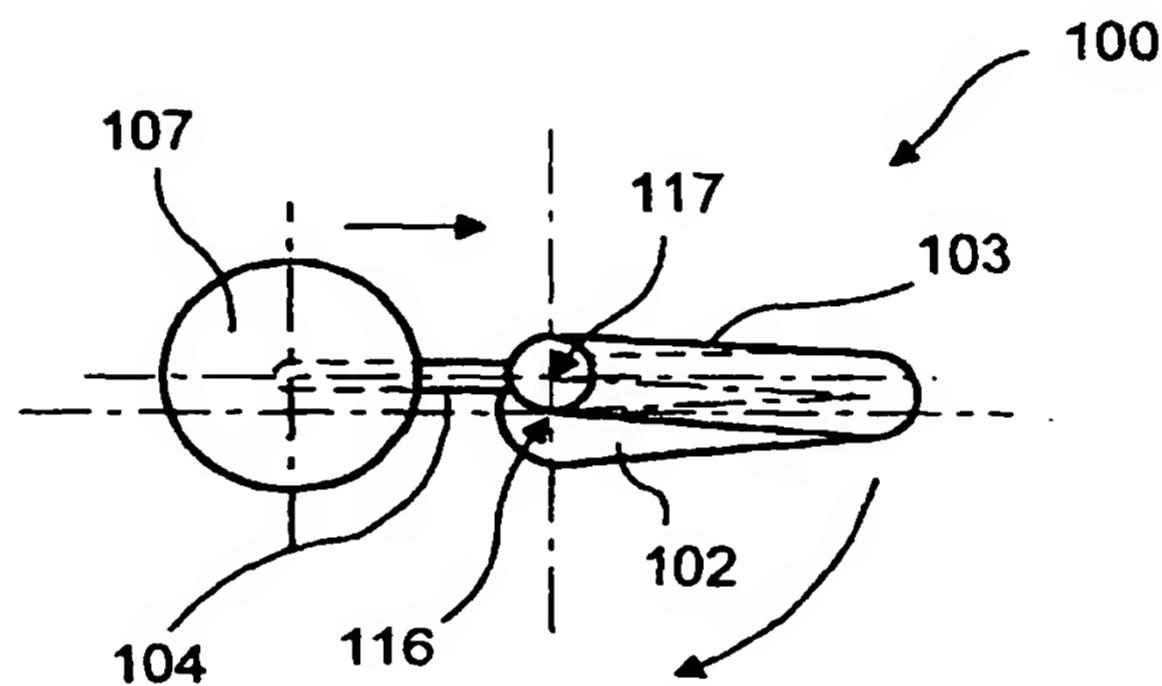


FIG. 20B

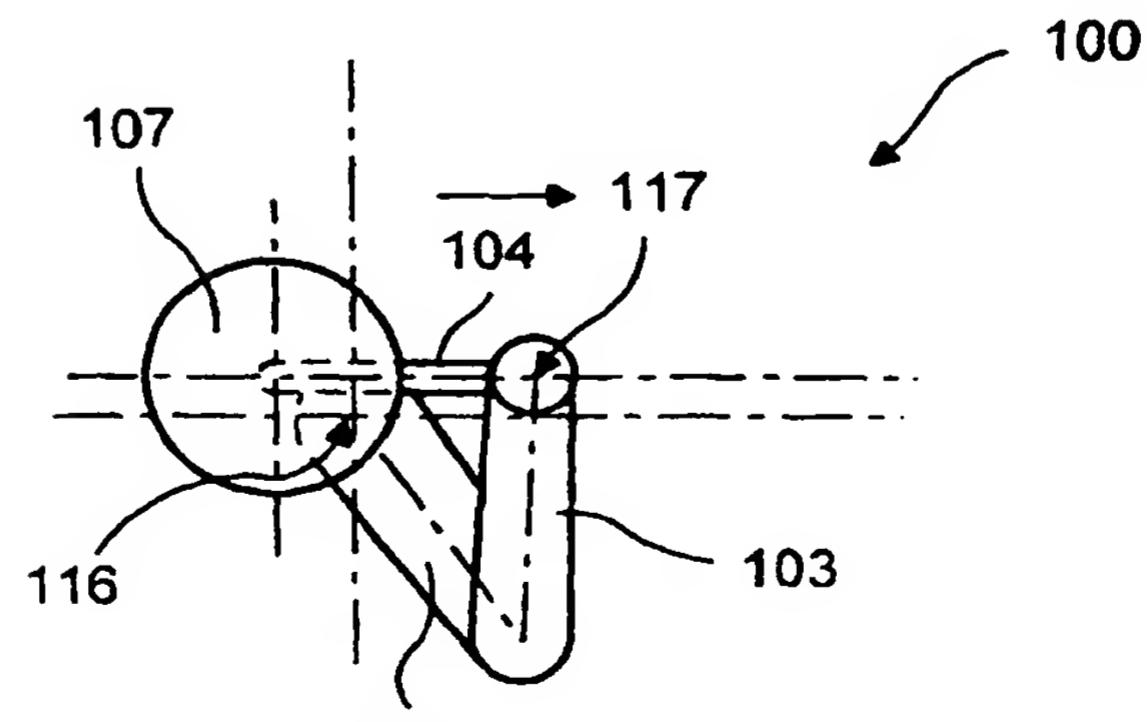
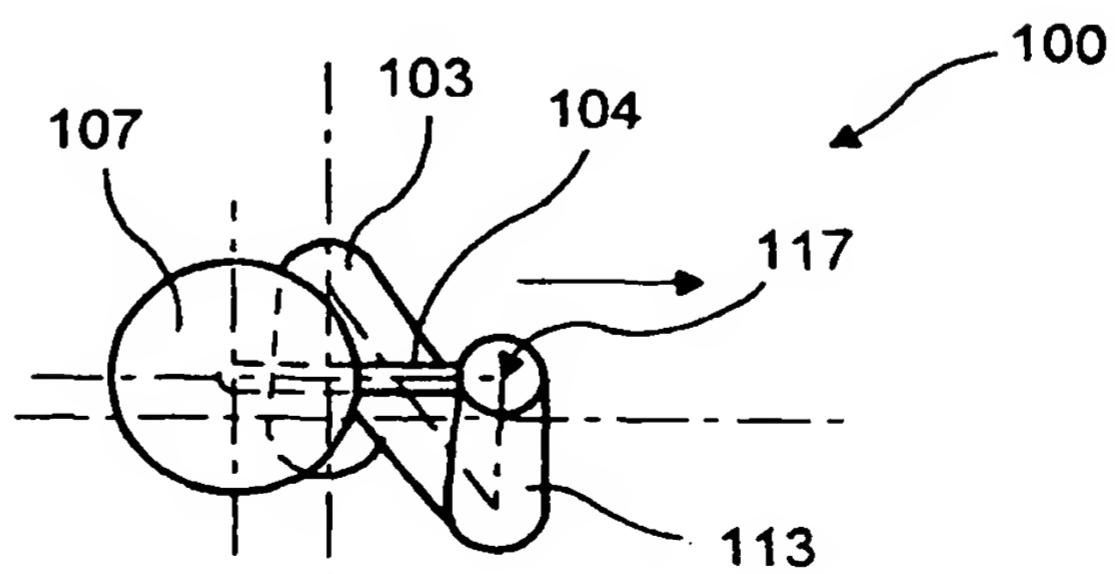
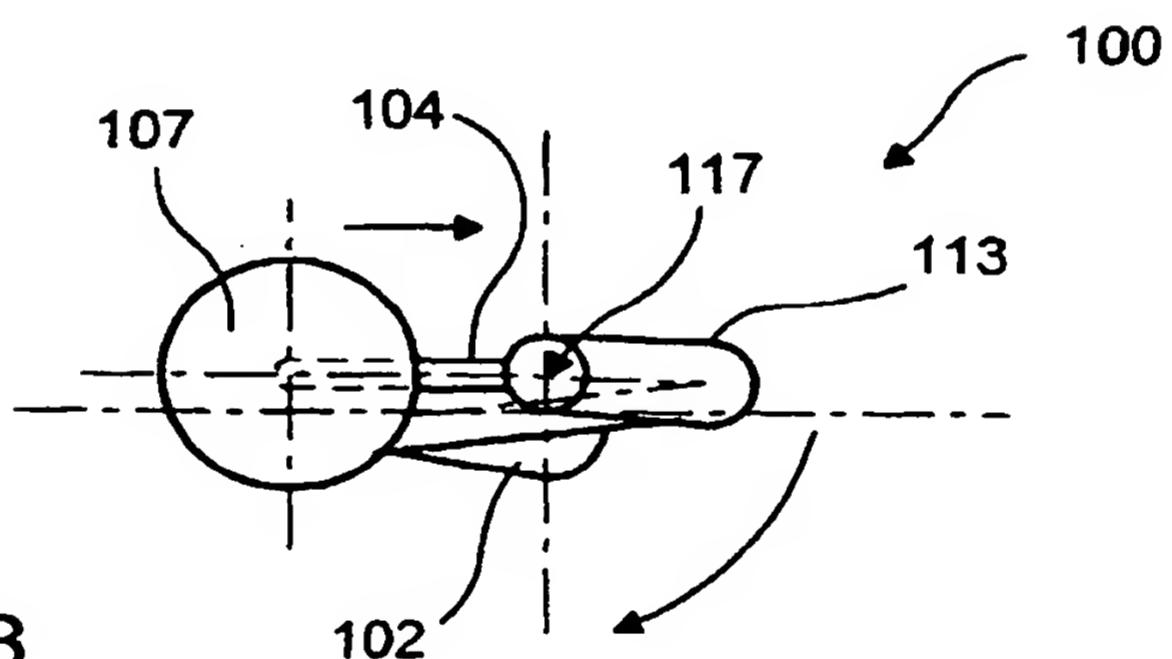
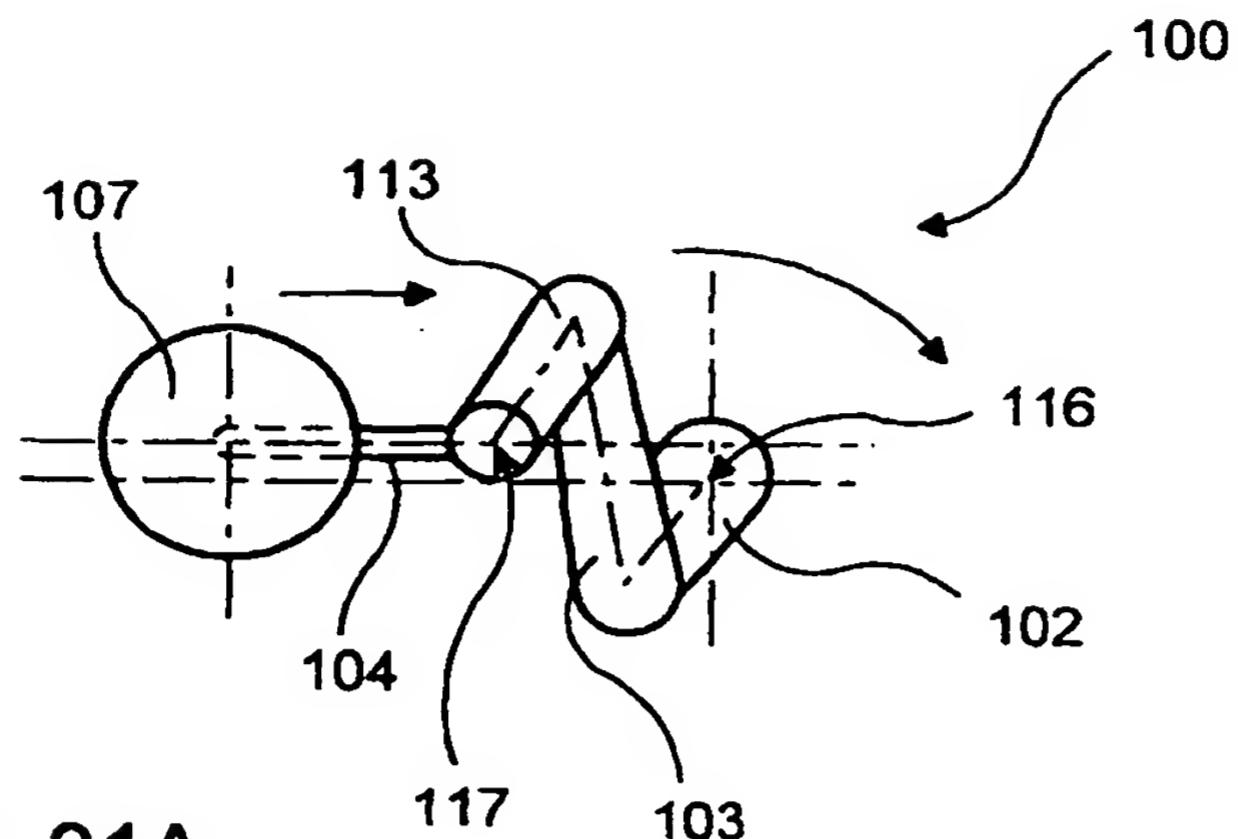


FIG. 20C



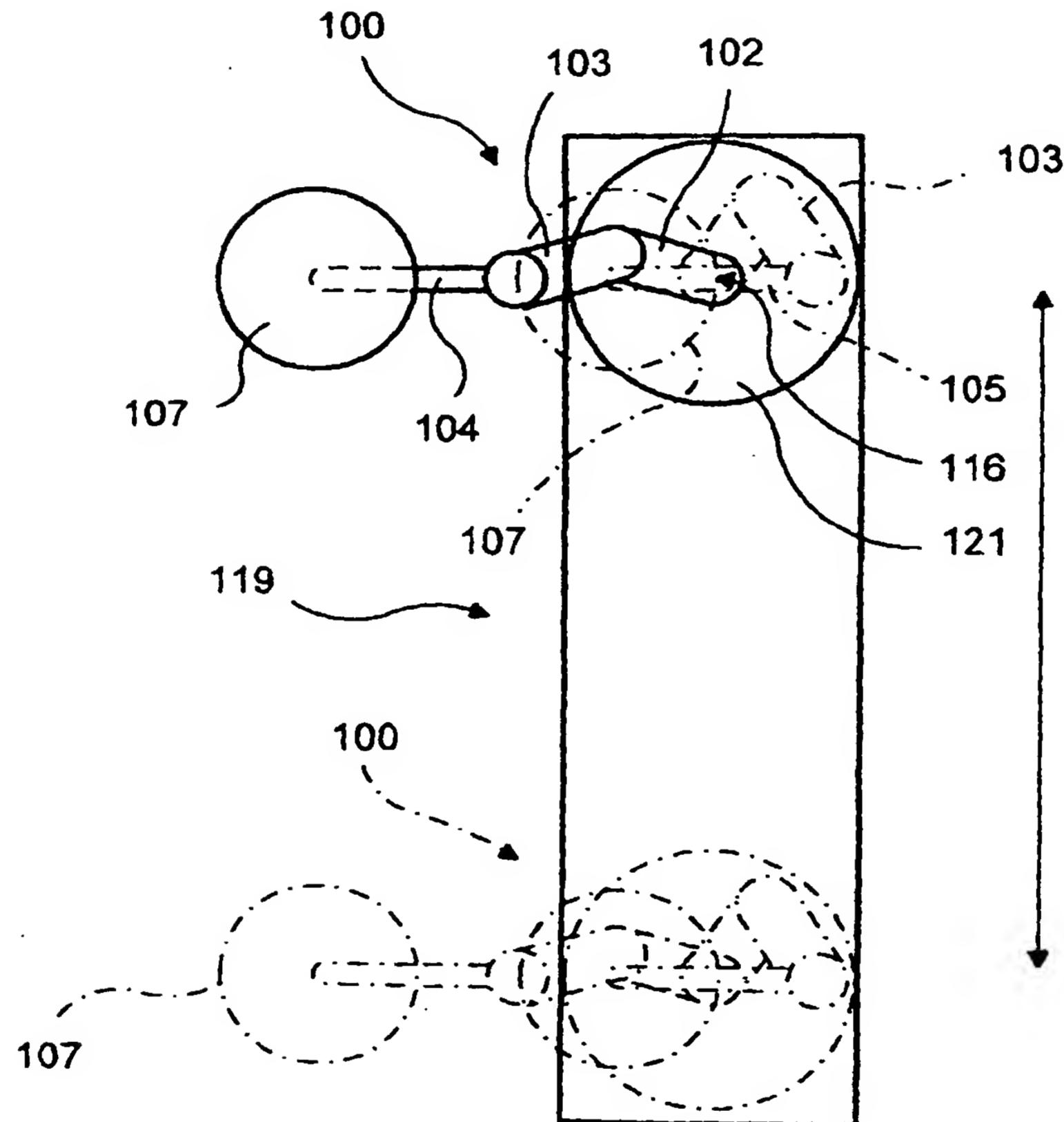
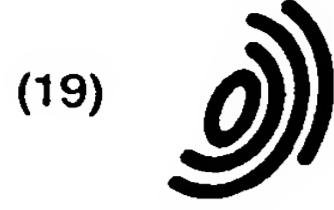


FIG. 22



(19) Europäisches Patentamt

European Patent Office

Office européen des brevets



(11) EP 0 913 236 A3

(12)

EUROPEAN PATENT APPLICATION

(88) Date of publication A3:
10.05.2000 Bulletin 2000/19

(51) Int. Cl.⁷: B25J 9/04, H01L 21/00,
B25J 9/06

(43) Date of publication A2:
06.05.1999 Bulletin 1999/18

(21) Application number: 98119888.0

(22) Date of filing: 21.10.1998

(84) Designated Contracting States:
AT BE CH CY DE DK ES FI FR GB GR IE IT LI LU
MC NL PT SE

Designated Extension States:
AL LT LV MK RO SI

(30) Priority: 30.10.1997 JP 29914597
06.11.1997 JP 30472097

(71) Applicant:
SANKYO SEIKI MFG. CO. LTD.
Suwa-gun, Nagano-ken 393-8511 (JP)

(72) Inventors:

- Tsuneda, Haruhiro
c/o Sankyo Seiki MFG. Co., Ltd.
Ina-shi, Nagano (JP)
- Kitahara, Yasuyuki
c/o Sankyo Seiki MFG. Co., Ltd.
Ina-shi, Nagano (JP)

(74) Representative:
Eisenführ, Speiser & Partner
Martinistrasse 24
28195 Bremen (DE)

(54) Articulated robot

(57) An articulated robot comprises a movable first transferring portion and a second transferring portion movably supported in relation to the movable first transferring portion by a joint portion. A workpiece is positioned at a position, where a workpiece positional deviation detecting means is located, by a hand portion formed at an end of the second transferring portion. The workpiece positional deviation detecting means detects the amount of deviation in the position of the workpiece. A positioning portion of the workpiece and a sensor portion for detecting deviations of the workpiece are formed either at the first transferring portion or the second transferring portion which form the articulated robot. A detecting operation by the sensor portion and transferring of the first and second transferring portions are enabled when the workpiece is positioned at the positioning portion of the articulated robot.

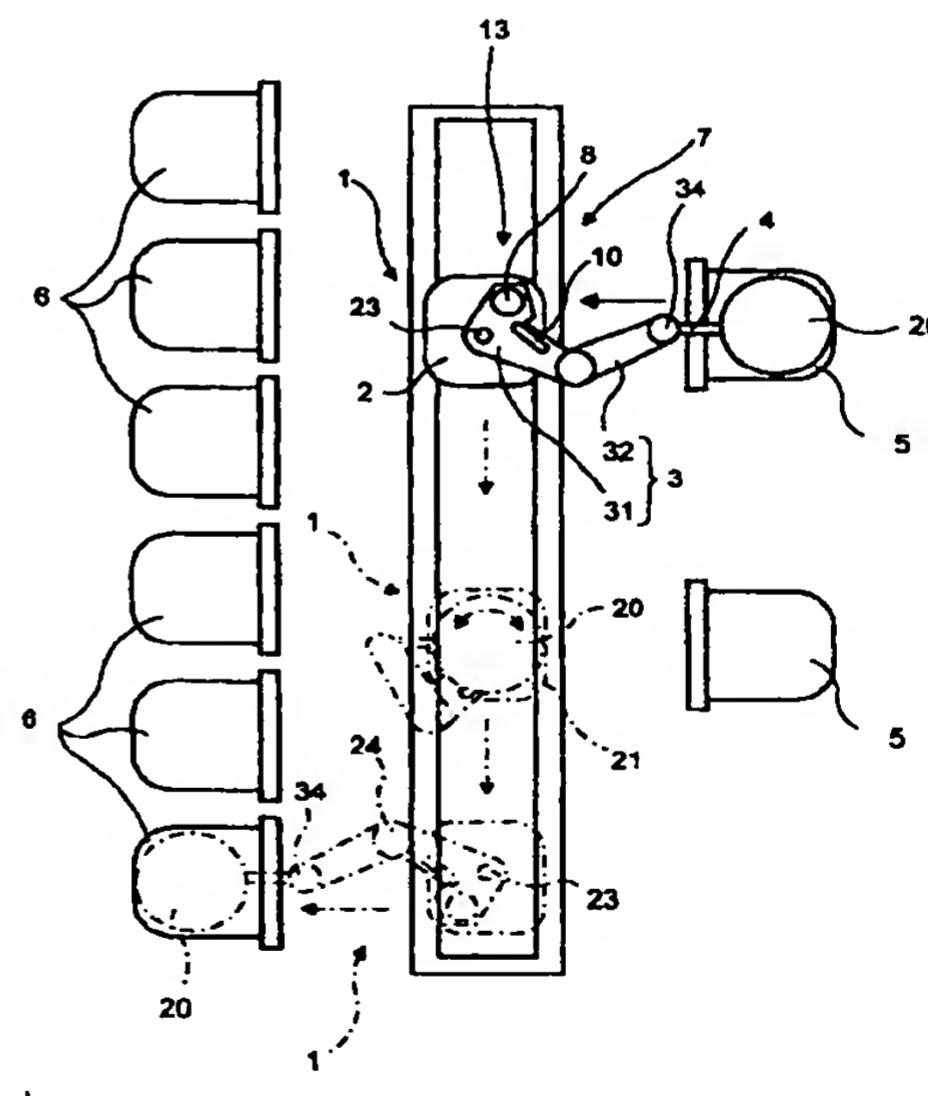


FIG. 1



DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT			
Category	Citation of document with indication, where appropriate, of relevant passages	Relevant to claim	CLASSIFICATION OF THE APPLICATION (Int.Cl.6)
X	EP 0 556 865 A (VARIAN ASSOCIATES) 25 August 1993 * abstract * * page 6, line 15-17 * * page 6, line 24-27 * * page 6, line 34,35 * * page 7, line 25 - page 8, line 11 * * page 7, line 25 - page 8, line 11 * * page 7, line 25 - page 8, line 11 * ---	1-4	B25J9/04 H01L21/00 B25J9/06
Y	US 4 693 663 A (BRENHOLT DAVID L ET AL) 15 September 1987 * abstract line 11; figure 1 * * abstract line 11; figure 1 *	5	
A	-----	7,10	
Y	US 4 693 663 A (BRENHOLT DAVID L ET AL) 15 September 1987 * abstract line 11; figure 1 * * abstract line 11; figure 1 *	5	
A	-----	6	
The present search report has been drawn up for all claims			
Place of search THE HAGUE	Date of completion of the search 24 November 1999	Examiner Lumineau, S	
CATEGORY OF CITED DOCUMENTS X : particularly relevant if taken alone Y : particularly relevant if combined with another document of the same category A : technological background O : non-written disclosure P : intermediate document		T : theory or principle underlying the invention E : earlier patent document, but published on, or after the filing date D : document cited in the application L : document cited for other reasons & : member of the same patent family, corresponding document	

**ANNEX TO THE EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT
ON EUROPEAN PATENT APPLICATION NO.**

EP 98 11 9888

This annex lists the patent family members relating to the patent documents cited in the above-mentioned European search report. The members are as contained in the European Patent Office EDP file on The European Patent Office is in no way liable for these particulars which are merely given for the purpose of information.

24-11-1999

Patent document cited in search report		Publication date		Patent family member(s)		Publication date
EP 0556865	A	25-08-1993		DE 3750558 D		27-10-1994
				DE 3750558 T		02-02-1995
				DE 3752234 D		24-12-1998
				DE 3752234 T		12-05-1999
				EP 0244202 A		04-11-1987
				JP 2103894 C		06-11-1996
				JP 4058184 B		16-09-1992
				JP 63023332 A		30-01-1988
				US 4836733 A		06-06-1989
-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
US 4693663	A	15-09-1987		NONE		
-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----

EPO FORM P0459

For more details about this annex : see Official Journal of the European Patent Office, No. 12/82



European Patent
Office

Application Number
EP 98 11 9888

CLAIMS INCURRING FEES

The present European patent application comprised at the time of filing more than ten claims.

- Only part of the claims have been paid within the prescribed time limit. The present European search report has been drawn up for the first ten claims and for those claims for which claims fees have been paid, namely claim(s):
- No claims fees have been paid within the prescribed time limit. The present European search report has been drawn up for the first ten claims.

LACK OF UNITY OF INVENTION

The Search Division considers that the present European patent application does not comply with the requirements of unity of invention and relates to several inventions or groups of inventions, namely:

see sheet B

- All further search fees have been paid within the fixed time limit. The present European search report has been drawn up for all claims.
- As all searchable claims could be searched without effort justifying an additional fee, the Search Division did not invite payment of any additional fee.
- Only part of the further search fees have been paid within the fixed time limit. The present European search report has been drawn up for those parts of the European patent application which relate to the inventions in respect of which search fees have been paid, namely claims:
- None of the further search fees have been paid within the fixed time limit. The present European search report has been drawn up for those parts of the European patent application which relate to the invention first mentioned in the claims, namely claims:

1-4, 5, 7, 10

LACK OF UNITY OF INVENTION
SHEET BApplication Number
EP 98 11 9888

The Search Division considers that the present European patent application does not comply with the requirements of unity of invention and relates to several inventions or groups of inventions, namely:

1. Claims: 1-10

An articulated robot for transferring workpieces comprising a first transferring portion and a second transferring portion (composed of two arms and a hand portion), characterized by a sensor portion to detect the deviation of the workpiece and a positioning portion (more specifically a rotating portion) to correct this deviation, being both located on one of the transferring portion.

2. Claims: 11-15

An articulated robot for transferring workpieces, comprising a turntable, two arms and a hand portion, characterized by means to prevent the generation of singularities in the movement of the arms, by separately controlling the different robot portions and thus shifting the position of the rotational axis.